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WEARING THE WHITE HAT:  
THE EFFECT OF AMERICAN STRATEGIC CULTURE ON  
IMPLEMENTING NATIONAL STRATEGY

BY  
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## **Disclaimer**

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

### *About the Author*

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## *Abstract*

This study analyzes the broad effect of strategic culture on the implementation of national security strategies, in particular whether American culture and traditions constrain and shape her application of military force. The study first examines roots of American culture as found in Western civilization. The conclusion is that while cultural restraints that exist in conducting war were developed within European society, their application was not universal; the level of threat to the warring parties involved and the identification of an adversary as being culturally and racially similar both determined when restraints were exercised. Building upon this foundation, the author next explores the American ideals of democracy, views of the role of technology, and ethical beliefs that all serve to shape her cultural perception of war and conflict resolution. Having established an American cultural model, the study evaluates its influence upon the implementation of US national strategies. The conclusion is that in an era in which the US is relatively unchallenged, particularly within the last decade, culturally imposed restraints have emerged as a significant factor in shaping the direction and scope of US force application. The significance of this must be taken into account by national command authorities prior to committing US military forces to any theater.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*Culture is like the sum of special knowledge that accumulates in any large united family and is the common property of all its members. When we of the Great culture meet, we exchange reminiscences about Grandfather Homer, Aunt Sappho, and poor Johnny Keats.*

—Aldous Huxley

People learn culture. Many aspects governing behavior are transmitted physiologically—an infant’s desire for food, for example, is triggered by internal stimuli. An adult’s specific desire for milk and cereal in the morning, on the other hand, cannot be explained as a physical reaction; rather it is a learned, hence cultural response to morning hunger. Culture, as a body of learned attitudes and beliefs common to a given society, acts like a template in that it has predictable form and content shaping the consciousness and behavior of its members across generations.

Culture is man’s medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture.<sup>1</sup> This means how people think, express themselves, how problems are solved, how governments are formed and managed, the full gamut of how man functions within a society. Yet, because the relationship between what is taught and what is learned is not absolute, culture exists in a constant state of change. While this makes defining culture difficult in that context must be always taken into account, it does help to

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Press, 1976), 14.

highlight traditional beliefs. For example, American culture holds individual liberty and freedom dearly. Through two hundred years of revolution, civil war, world war, and countless political movements, this fundamental belief has survived becoming an indelible part of what it means to be an American.

While time is helpful in establishing long term social beliefs, it does not lessen the difficulty in studying a field that is riddled with intangibles. As such, it is necessary before delving into a study of culture to clarify ground rules so as to establish conformity in definition and scope. Given the wide-ranging influence that culture has upon us all, attempts to give it definition have also ranged across the wide spectrum of academia. For the purposes of this study, culture can be defined as an interdependent set of fundamental symbols, values, attitudes, and beliefs, common to a specific group, that condition that group's behavior by coloring its perceptions and preferences.

It is important to elaborate this definition in two ways: first, "common to a specific group" serves to highlight that the subject of this study is traditional established cultural beliefs rather than those that may be generation specific. For example, American culture has traditionally been suspicious of the military. While this may be attributable to the American experience in gaining her independence from Great Britain, it takes on a slightly different light if one talks to a 1920 advocate of isolationism as opposed to a 1970 peace activist protesting the war in Vietnam. In this study we are focusing on established cross-generational beliefs. The second point involves the predictive nature of culture. The use of this term does not imply that culture is the sole determinant in a nation's decision-making process. The environment, available information on the subject, and other factors, all weigh into selecting a course of action. However, our understanding

of the world around us is ultimately shaped by the cognitive interpretation of these external factors. Interpretation is largely a learned behavioral outlook based on culture. One only need watch a frustrated American tourist in Rome on a business day who fails to understand why Italian retail stores close for several hours in the afternoon for rest to understand differences in interpretation.

This study will explore American strategic culture, that is, how American culture conditions the nation's strategic behavior. This is a work that looks at national conception:<sup>2</sup> how the U.S. views herself, her role in the world, and how best to interact with the other members in it, specifically in instances where military force is exercised. As such, this study is directed at the grand strategic level, a field that inevitably evokes the ghost of a Prussian past.

Carl von Clausewitz, the highly acclaimed 18<sup>th</sup> century Prussian military theorist, concluded "that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."<sup>3</sup> As such, the political object – the original motive for the war – will thus determine both the military objective to be reached *and the amount* of effort it requires.<sup>4</sup> Hence any constraints or limitations placed upon the conduct of war, Clausewitz contends, are those derived from a rational amoral assessment of what is in the best interest of the nation to the attainment of the political objective in question. Rationality however is not the sole determinant of constraints in war. A nation's specific strategic culture, encompassing its attitudes and beliefs concerning war, has a profound effect in determining its focus and conduct.

### Notes

<sup>2</sup> The term "conception" means cognitive construction, not the social/political birth of a nation.

<sup>3</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. And trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

Culturally colored restrictions imposed upon the conduct of war are those based on values that may transcend a rational assessment of what is in the best interest of the nation. This then raises the question as to the extent imposed constraints in war, motivated by a nation's strategic culture, impair her ability to effectively wage war. This is the fundamental question of this study: *Does the U.S. cultural concept of "fighting fairly," that is in ways constrained by American values, hinder the nation's ability to effectively respond to threats endangering national security?*

Granted, this is an immense topic encompassing many fields of study from history to social science to anthropology, which is probably the reason that it is rarely explored. In fact, some scholars disagree that America has any cultural tendency to fight fairly, contending that US foreign and defense policies are, in fact, quite Clausewitzian in using force with little regard to moral constraints. However, this view fails to account for recent US strategic behavior in Somalia, Iraq, and the Balkans. Nor does this contention explain US investments in non-lethal technologies or her recent apparent love affair with precision guided weaponry. This study examines this view by using historical analysis to first define American ethical beliefs in the application of force, then by analyzing recent case studies, and evaluates their effect. As such, the aim of this study is to provide the professional military educator and governmental strategist an appreciation of American cultural beliefs that must be taken into account when devising strategies in pursuit of national objectives.

In helping to remove the blinders to strategic vision, this study is divided into three sections. Chapter Two recognizes that the American cultural heritage has Western European roots, and examines the evolution of the chivalric ideal of fairness from its

early manifestation in Greece to the emergence of Napoleon. Chapter Three builds on this foundation, examining the American concept of war as complicated by her abandonment of isolationism for the role of international crusader. Having established American cultural norms regarding the conduct of war, Chapter Four examines to what extent these beliefs influence her ability to successfully employ military force in instances where intervention is deemed necessary.

The question of when and how to use instruments of military force is probably the most difficult decision facing any leader. Perhaps it is the finality of its application that so daunts the decision. After all, one can rebuild a nation's economy or infrastructure, one cannot replace the loss of life. Man at his heart is a social animal motivated by a myriad of impulses and feelings beyond simple rational calculation. This desire to interact with others fosters a sense of belonging that in turn creates common attitudes and beliefs based on unique group dynamics and shared experiences. These conceptions, acting through shared symbols and values, influence the ways in which individuals, and hence nations, react to events and others within the world around them. To suggest, therefore, that culture does not effect the decision to use force is to imply that man acts purely according to his self-interest alone. This is in error. Culture has a distinct impact on how a nation interprets the world; therefore it has a direct impact on the direction a nation takes.

If culture truly does have an impact on the decision process of nations, then it is necessary in determining its ramifications to first explore the foundation upon which its beliefs and perceptions are based. In the case of what is considered Western culture this, begins with ancient Greece.

## Chapter 2

### The Rules of Combat

*All the world wonder'd:  
Plunged in the battery-smoke  
Right thro' the line they broke;  
Cossak and Russian  
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke  
Shatter'd and sunder'd.  
Then they rode back, but not  
Not the six hundred*

—Alfred Lord Tennyson

Carl Von Clausewitz begins his definitive work *On War* with a simple yet key definition of war: “War is thus an act of force to compel our enemies to do our will...Attached to force are certain self-imposed, imperceptible limitations hardly worth mentioning, known as international law and custom, but they scarcely weaken it.”<sup>5</sup> Yet war, irrespective of how force is applied, is fought by human beings that are influenced strongly by social customs and beliefs. It would be foolish indeed to propose that the initiation of combat instantly quells the social psyche and ethics of a soldier who is ultimately a reflection of the society in which he was reared.

To explore the development of moral constraints in war requires a working definition of the term. War, by its very nature involves conflict, yet not all conflict can be considered war. Forty percent of human skeletons recovered in Egyptian Nubia, dating

#### Notes

<sup>5</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. And trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 75.

some 12,000 to 14,000 years in age, showed evidence of violent death brought about by lethal weapons.<sup>6</sup> These remains are a testament to the nature of violent conflict in the lives of primitive humans, but not of war. War can be defined as a level of conflict encompassed within a society's organizational structure and social hierarchy that applies technology, specifically in weapon development, with some degree of methodology and expertise.<sup>7</sup>

The development of society is key in differentiating between marauding nomadic raiding and war. As the agricultural revolution allowed previously nomadic tribes to settle, a sense of communal identity evolved. The evolution of a social construct fostered the development of shared customs, values, and gave rise to social structures and classes. Inevitably a warrior class emerged as the protector of the community. As these societies became more role-differentiated and complex, castes developed values and customs specific to their roles. These caste values, or norms, were often reinforced within the society through ceremonies, rituals, and eventually literature. Over time a set of ideals evolved in which each class sought to regulate the behavior of its members. These ideals, often acting as constraints, are worth examining further.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Phalanx**

Nowhere, except perhaps in the golden age of chivalry, was warfare more romanticized than in ancient Greece. It was the Greeks who first developed the idea that “warfare ennobled the human spirit,” the idea that only in combat were “the highest

### **Notes**

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence H. Keely, *War Before Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Influenced by Richard A. Gabriel, *The Culture of War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 20.

<sup>8</sup> For a closer examination, see Javed Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Society* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997).

values of man – courage, valor, and sacrifice – made manifest.”<sup>9</sup> The appearance of this idealized concept of war gave rise to the notion that man fights not only in defense of his society, but also in defense of his ideals. This was a powerful psychological shift in that it began to construct a set of ethics in the application of warfare.

The Greeks informally internalized the ideals that would later govern intra-Hellenistic warfare. Two formal agreements have survived outlining conduct in war. The first was a tradition reported by the geographer Strabo around 700 BCE during the War of the Lelantine Plain, in which the contending parties agreed to the abandonment of missile weapons. The second tradition, mentioned by the orator Aeschines, suggests that after the First Sacred War (fought over control of the oracle at Delphi) around 600 BCE, the victorious states swore never again to cut off food or water from besieged fellow Greeks (a practice that was to occur centuries later in the Peloponnesian War). The majority of Greek rules of war, often referred to as “the common customs (*koina nomina*) of the Hellenes,” established traditions and customs that were socially reinforced by the Homeric sagas and mythology.

By the beginning of the seventh century BCE the Greek city-state or polis, constituted the basic frame on which regional government and society was organized. The polis structured and focused labor efforts that resulted not only in enhancing the shared sense of communality among its members but also further stratified social classes. As such, each polis was increasingly able to enlist a greater portion of its citizenry for military service. This increase in combatants, along with technological development in

## Notes

<sup>9</sup> Gabriel, *The Culture of War* (Note 3), 86.



shield design and weaponry, gave rise to a military formation that would dominate ancient warfare – the hoplite phalanx.<sup>10</sup>

“Phalanx warfare evolved rapidly in the early seventh century BCE and it was soon fully institutionalized as the dominant mode of violent dispute resolution between the Greek poleis.”<sup>11</sup> The hoplite phalanx was essentially a formation of heavy infantry woven tightly together so that the large shields that each soldier carried established a defensive wall from which the phalanx could protectively close upon the enemy, thereby overpowering it via mass and close order combat. The goal, in fact the very survival of the phalanx, depended on the complete homogeneity of effort. Each member of the phalanx relied on his neighbor, regardless of social standing (the phalanx membership included a wide range of social classes– essentially anyone who could afford the weaponry), which in turn promoted an egalitarian ethos within the ranks.

Traditional hoplite warfare is in essence without strategy, the object being to close with the enemy and, through sheer force and steadfastness, shatter his phalanx. It is therefore not surprising that rules of conduct in war supported this formation. The outcome of a battle was considered decisive by both sides (which in turn greatly limited the scope and duration of the conflict), surrender could not be refused if requested, and a retreating enemy was exempt from attack. Greek chivalry required men to demonstrate prowess through allegiance to the phalanx and close fighting skills. Use of the bow, which was more likely to wound from afar, resulting in death from lingering pain or

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<sup>10</sup> In Greece the term hoplite referred to a social class that could bear arms in city defense. Typically any male could be considered a hoplite if he could afford the capital investment in the appropriate arms and armor.

<sup>11</sup> Joshua Ober, “Classical Greek Times,” *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World*, ed. Michael Howard, George J. Andreopoulos, and Mark R. Shulman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 15.

infection, and did not permit the victim to see his opponent, was considered unfair and cowardly.<sup>12</sup> Strategies based on attacking the social or economic system of an enemy was also banned by these informal rules of war – further reinforcing the existing social order.<sup>13</sup>

The hoplite phalanx dominated inter-Greek conflict from 700 – 400 BCE. As a result of the ethical constraints that regulated phalanx warfare, conflicts between poleis were short in duration and rarely endangered their survival. Yet it was a very different matter when Greeks fought non-Greeks as in the case of the Persian Wars of 490-478 BCE, where the existence of the polis was indeed in jeopardy. Although the Greeks used hoplite tactics against the numerically superior Persians, existing rules of combat did not seem to apply. Retreating Persians at Marathon were pursued and slaughtered, and the surviving Persians from the Athenian victory at Plataea were killed after their surrender.<sup>14</sup> What the Persian Wars demonstrated was that rules governing combat were, given a change in the totality of the war, strictly voluntary.

Ironically, the death knell for the “common customs of the Hellenes” came half a century later with the Peloponnesian War, a struggle that was essentially between two Greek states – Athens and Sparta. A full account of the Peloponnesian War is beyond the scope of this limited study, a period that Thucydides covers quite well. Nevertheless the conflict is of critical importance in that the traditional constraints governing inter-Greek combat devolved as the result of this war.

The impetus behind the Peloponnesian War was the rising power of Athens, a strong sea power with a robust economy and democratic government that increasingly sought to

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<sup>12</sup> Gabriel, *The Culture of War* (Note 3), 91.

<sup>13</sup> Ober, “Classical Greek Times,” (Note 7), 18.

expand its influence on the Greek mainland. Sparta, a landed polis, had a powerful army, but one predicated on a significant weakness: while her soldiers were comprised of citizens, her economy was based upon perpetual sharecroppers called Helots who had few rights and were held in constant check by the Spartan warrior caste, but comprised 90 percent of the population. Athens, unwilling to engage in direct combat with Sparta, constructed a military base at Pylos in Messenia from which she encouraged Helot insurrection. Additionally, Athens constructed a large wall around the city and determined to survive through sea trade. The war, instead of becoming a quick battle of phalanxes as envisioned by the Spartans, became something altogether different – a 27-year war of attrition.

In the end Athens was defeated by the combination of a devastating plague that reduced her manpower and the ability of Sparta, through Persian subsidiaries, to expand its naval force and threaten the ability of Athens to feed its populace. Cut free from the traditional constraints that were built upon the phalanx, inter-Greek conflicts were no longer limited in duration and were often fought with mercenaries. The employment of mercenaries, free of communal attachment and seeking personal financial gain in the acquisition of booty, meant that the pursuit and annihilation of defeated enemies became more common.<sup>15</sup> Strategies based on social disruption and the destruction of both agricultural and economic resources became the new style of warfare with the “common customs of the Hellenes” fading into romantic literature. The adoption of a new style of war in which a state’s infrastructure is targeted was a direct result of the evolution of the polis. As the economic and political complexity of the polis grew, so did warfare. Many

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 23.

Greek city-states, like Sparta, quickly realized that wars between Greeks were no longer being fought for limited gains, but for absolute ones in which the very existence of the community was at stake. Given the higher stakes, constraints protecting combatants lessened. If action on the battlefield was to follow specific rules, then the obligation to do so needed to supersede, at least in the minds of the participants, allegiance to the state. Enter the Roman Catholic Church.

## **The Cross**

The Barbarian tribes that finally delivered the deathblow to the Roman Empire never realized how priceless was the institution they destroyed, nor how difficult it would be to replace. Yet Roman moral authority did not evaporate altogether; it re-emerged in the institutions of the Catholic Church, firmly established thanks to the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312 CE, and in the church “the idea if not the substance of the empire found a continuum.”<sup>16</sup> This is not to suggest that rules of conduct in warfare were absent during the period of Imperial Rome, especially given the emergence of Christianity within in its empire, but what the fall of Rome did signify was that Christianity, reluctantly tolerated in early Rome, now had center stage as the preeminent social construct.

The conversion of Constantine foreshadowed a change in the Western concept of war. A Christian empire and a Christian army defending the nucleus of a civilized world against heretics and vandals created an atmosphere more favorable to the conception of a “just war” and Christian pacifism than did the imperial conquests for Roman territorial glory. Without swords, however, the church first needed to establish stability in an

environment, absent Roman control, that was increasingly chaotic as factions fought for localized power. The church therefore focused initially on *jus ad bellum*, the right to wage war.

The development of what is termed “just war” theory is of immense importance to the development of a western style of warfare. It put war, theoretically at least, under the dominion of conscience, and in so doing established the precedence where right was placed above might. War now required moral sanction, but more importantly it could no longer be conducted at the whim of local factions but only by recognized states. Warfare, as far as the church was concerned, was the purview of professionals.

Early Christian doctrine regarding *jus ad bellum* was first formulated by Ambrose and then developed more fully by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Ambrose never entertained any reservations regarding Christian participation in war; undoubtedly his position as Bishop of Milan in Northern Italy, where defense of the empire coincided with a defense of his faith, shaded his view. His work, *On the Duties of the Clergy*, influenced by Stoicism and the Old Testament, gave rise to the concept of the “just war,” in which the suppliant was to be spared and good faith was to be observed with the enemy.<sup>16</sup> Although the later efforts of Augustine and Aquinas gave greater definition to this theory, Ambrose’s work signaled a fundamental shift in Christian doctrine on the applicability and conduct of war.

Augustine (354-430 CE), considered by many to be the father of *jus ad bellum*, was at heart a realist. Although early Christian pacifism stressed that violence in any form was morally wrong, Augustine, writing in the last throes of the Roman Empire,

### Notes

<sup>16</sup> John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: First Vintage Books, 1993), 283.

<sup>17</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 91.

concluded that peace on earth, allowing for the absence of violence, was untenable. Perfect peace, Augustine concluded, was reserved for heaven, where there shall be no hunger, nor thirst, nor provocation of enemies.<sup>18</sup> The church, although imperfect, needed to be protected since it provided the stability from which Christianity and peace could flourish. The overarching framework and importance of Augustine's work rests largely on two tenets: the separation of intent from action; and the codification of what constitutes a combatant.

The object of a "just war", Augustine argued, was the establishment of peace. War was not to be condoned for the pursuit of earthly wealth, but only as a means to vindicate justice, a term Augustine only vaguely defined. Attacks on the existence of a state, or the restoration of territory unjustly taken were injustices that, Augustine argued, sanctioned the application of force. For Augustine, intent was a key element in determining if the military action was justified. The intent of a soldier defending his state, for example, was not the subjugation of a population or the destruction of a society's foundation. Therefore, given that his intent was to preserve peace by defending an established state, his cause was justified, and violence, although regrettable, was allowed.

Having established the parameters within which armed conflict could be justly waged, Augustine then focused on defining who may be considered a combatant. To Augustine, war was to be waged only under the authority of the state. A private citizen should not kill even in personal defense, unless he happened to be a soldier or a public functionary acting not for himself, but in the defense of others or of the city in which he resided.<sup>19</sup> The conduct of war must also follow stringent guidelines; there should be no

#### **Notes**

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 98.

wanton violence, looting, profanation of temples, or massacre. Acts of vengeance or reprisals were excluded as this prevented the establishment of peace, which was of course the only objective that a Christian under arms could justly pursue.

Augustine established the initial Roman Catholic position on war, the influence of which remains evident today. However, in exploring his work one must remember the historical context in which it was written. Augustine was living in a world that was constantly threatened by invasion from nomadic tribes from the north. The church, as a consequence of Roman imperial decline, increasingly was looked upon as the one anchor of social stability. If the church was going to survive the loss of Roman imperial protection, it needed to establish a precedence in which its members could take up arms for her defense. Augustine allowed for this by codifying the objective of war and strictly narrowing its participants.

Building upon the work of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE), in his work *Summa Theologica*, further codified the church's position on warfare. Aquinas reduced his position on war to three conditions: that a just war must have a just cause; that it must be fought on right authority; and that it must be waged by a right intention. A just cause, argued Aquinas, existed where there is some fault to be punished. Right authority existed where the magistrate was acting as a "minister of God execut[ing] his vengeance upon the evildoer."<sup>20</sup> Aquinas reinforced the Augustinian definition of a combatant by identifying him as a member of the established military and not as a private citizen. However, what made Aquinas unique from other theologians was his elaboration on what constitutes an injustice to which force may be applied.

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<sup>20</sup> James Turner Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 39.

Like Augustine, Aquinas recognized that in war there is always a just side: the vindicator, fighting against an unjust opponent that has perpetrated some evil. Akin to his predecessor, this may at first glance appear to solely imply a defensive focus, however Aquinas contended that heresy, being a universal crime against God, allowed the just to take the offensive, regardless of how warlike the heretics may or may not be. Aquinas's work helped to arm the church with an offensive dogma that would later serve its interest in the Crusades and the Americas. Aquinas's third requirement of a right intention in war reinforced the Christian goal of peacemaking and charity towards an enemy, but also added the goal of correcting, in the case of heresy, an enemy's "error in judgment." Theologically, this addition influenced the Christian concept of the armed missionary, the soldier who took arms not only to establish peace but also to spread the word of the church. As such, restraint towards the enemy was advocated as a conduit for post-conflict reconciliation and conversion. Unfortunately, this advocacy, at least against non-Europeans, was seldom actually followed.

The Augustinian and Thomist teachings had significant impact on the Roman Catholic doctrine of the righteousness of war which, given the power of the church in early European history, strongly influenced a more universal Western philosophy with respect to armed conflict. The demise of Imperial Rome left a political and social vacuum that threatened to unravel European society by accelerating previously suppressed regional conflicts. The Roman Catholic Church, through *jus ad bellum* and the spread of Christianity, attempted to fill this void. War, at least in the eyes of the Church, needed to be legitimized, if it was to be regulated and, more importantly, restrained.



To place this period into perspective, two points should be kept in mind regarding church doctrine. First, *jus ad bellum* provided an internal constraint in terms of vindictive justice: a war was just only if fought to right an injustice. Second, the development of *jus ad bellum* fostered the return, at least in spirit, of the “common customs of the Hellenes” now incorporated within *jus in bello*, rules governing the conduct of war. Granted, these rules were not always followed; in fact the allowance for war to be waged against heresy often served as a catalyst and legal justification for European expansionism. Regardless, Roman Catholic just war doctrine did have a significant impact on the development of Western value orientation towards war. The values of justice, restraint, and martial fairness to an enemy all would find ample expression within the literature and social stratification of the Middle Ages. The emergence of chivalry buttressed the teachings of the church and further solidified existing rules of combat.

### **The Lance**

Just war doctrine bequeathed by the late Middle Ages to the modern world was an amalgamation of two quite distinct rationales: the theological, derived from church doctrine, and the legal, drawn from Roman law and chivalric code. In the previous section we discussed the influence of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas; in this section our focus is on the secular dimension. This separation, while done for ease of presentation, may give the reader a false impression that does not properly reflect the level of influence that each side has had upon each other. It must be remembered that the church, as the dominant social institution during this period, served to underwrite both *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* theory. This level of interaction ensured relative consistency in doctrine, but also the means of enforcement, relying ultimately on the leverage of the Pope.

Some historians have argued that chivalric codes, while influential in their period, were so diminished and changed by the Hundred Years' War (ending in 1453) that their increasing irrelevance to actual conduct in war became more and more apparent, until they were held up to ridicule in *Don Quixote*.<sup>21</sup> And while the influence of chivalry is essential when exploring the Middle Ages, its relevance to modern just war doctrine is perhaps overstated. What is often overlooked is the fact that the chivalric law of arms did not perish, but was extended and regulated through legalization, largely in the fourteenth century, in an effort to apply emerging knightly customs to both common soldiers and nobility. For the common soldier, chivalry would be incorporated within the developing regimental system as nation states emerged following the Treaty of Westphalia. For knights, the chivalric code would become the concept of the gentleman, a code of ethics and behavior adopted as an effort to define the traditional upper social class. It is therefore critical to examine that sometimes elusive notion of chivalry as a transitional step from ancient custom to modern just war doctrine.

By the fourteenth century, as theologians wrestled with the origins and justification of war, a combination of knightly traditions and Roman legal theory gave birth to a formal system of military law, the *jus militare*, or the law of the knights.<sup>22</sup> During the Hundred Years War, charges brought under these emerging laws were assigned to special military or royal courts – the Court of Chivalry in England and the Parlement of Paris in France – where both canon law theologians and knights attempted to refine and interpret military custom as law. As both the church and these chivalric courts strove to frame a universal set of laws, several attempts were made to record these customs into writing.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>22</sup> Robert C. Stacey, "Age of Chivalry," *The Laws of War* (Note 7), 31.

Two of the more prominent works were Honore' Bonet's *L'Arbre des batailles* (*Tree of Battles*) and Christine De Pisan's *Les Faits d'armes et de chivalrie* (*Acts of Arms and Chivalry*).

Bonet, writing between 1382 and 1387, focused primarily on two traditions, that of medieval chivalry, expressed through praise of the virtuousness of war and the truly strong knight, and that of the church, echoing theological doctrine by praising war as an avenue for justice and the punishment of sinners. To Bonet war was not evil: "...the truth is that war is not an evil thing, but is good and virtuous; for war, by its very nature, seeks nothing other than to set wrong right, and to turn dissension to peace, in accordance with Scripture."<sup>23</sup>

The knight, Bonet contended, embodied the union of strength in body and soul, both provided by God. Perhaps no other work of the period better captured chivalry's romantic notion of justice, where God, through the work of knights in the field, dispensed justice through the trial of combat. Given this elevated responsibility, it was inherent that knights adhere to strict rules of conduct:

As a first sign you will observe that he [the knight] finds all his pleasure and all his delight in being in arms, and in just wars, and in defending all just quarrels, and holy arguments. The second sign is that such a man, seeing the great ill and peril incurred in such a war, or maintaining such quarrel, should yet not quit his purpose, nor for any labor or travail fear to expose his body to fair fight and strict justice.<sup>24</sup>

Bonet's argument was fairly straightforward: when knights acted virtuously – that is, by established traditions of fairness and restraint – war itself was virtuous and good. Pisan, writing in 1408, was in many ways a synthesis of Bonetian romanticism and Church

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<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War* (Note 16), 67.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 68.

theology.<sup>25</sup> Like Bonet, Pisan contended that wars should only be waged for the sake of justice and undertaken by sovereign princes for the protection of their subjects. Akin to church doctrine, Pisan argued that three categories amounted to just cause for war: to sustain the church, to defend vassals, and to help allies.<sup>26</sup> Beyond the popularity she enjoyed during this period, what distinguishes her work was her treatment of noncombatant immunity. To Pisan, the knight represented more than God's instrument to correct injustice, he was also a protector sworn to guard women, widows, children, and the weak. Pisan drew a distinction between class and canon law. The knight, representing the nobility and solely responsible for the welfare of the common weal, was bound by canon law as an instrument of social stability and justice. Commoners, while bound by church law, were nevertheless considered noncombatants with justice being served by the virtuousness of the knights entrusted with their protection. The theory held that if the knight was just – made so by strict adherence to established laws and customs – then justice in society would be correctly served.

Beyond the debates of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, the laws of war in the Middle Ages were also constructed on the principle of individuality. To many knights soldiering was regarded as a Christian profession, not a public service. Though he took up arms in a public quarrel, for the most part, the knight still fought as an individual. The knight provided his own equipment, horses, attendees, and even his own ransom if captured. This sense of individuality fostered identification with other knights that carried beyond

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<sup>25</sup> “Christine De Pisan’s background is noteworthy. She was a champion of the rights of women in an age where women were considered inferior to men. Proceeds from her book, which was fairly well read for the period, were enough to support herself and her three children after the death of her husband. Her patronage by Queen Isabeau of France also helped to vault the popularity of her work.” Cited in Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War* (Note 16), 72.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

the battlefield. Knights facing each other across the field were considered opponents, rather than enemies. Perhaps the best illustration of this mentality was the idea of the tournament.

The medieval tournament was a strange mix of martial prowess, sport, romantic imagery, and social interaction - sort of an ancient Super Bowl. At the tournament, skill and grace in the martial arts were given high value, taking precedence over brute force, cunning, and deceit. The strict rules of the tournament offered a perfect opportunity to highlight the knight in the best possible light. Thanks to heraldry, Knights were also easily identifiable, making the importance of reputation even more critical. The victorious knight was the one that not only fought bravely, but more important, fairly.<sup>27</sup> While it is easy to overstate the importance of the tournament in creating laws of conduct in war, especially given the immense amount of romantic literature on the subject, one has to acknowledge that from a social perspective, they gave vivid expression to developing theological and secular just war doctrine. The tournament, through its treatment in literature and art, romanticized the notion of a code of chivalry. Many centuries later, those who feared social and industrial change in the nineteenth century revived the idealism of the Middle Ages, albeit a narrow view of it, resulting in an almost romantic euphoria as Europe marched towards the fields of France in World War I.

Placing the secular contribution to the development of just war doctrine and *jus in bello*, in perspective, several conclusions can be drawn. In wars that were regarded as just, so far as developing theological doctrine could determine, it was the residue of the chivalric code that required every soldier to treat those on the enemy side with the least severity possible. Further, the codification and dissemination of chivalric customs made it

possible to judge the relative justice of the opponents in war on the basis of the manner in which each side fought for its cause.<sup>28</sup> However, it is important to note that these constraints were only applicable to other Europeans. Knights during the Crusades and the early explorers of the New World felt no obligation to extend these rights to the indigenous population.

The development of standards of justice also helped to lay the foundation for the concept of war crimes. Finally, the influence of both theological and secular work into the development of just war theory and laws of conduct served to counter, with varying effectiveness, the argument that an absolute end, the defense of Christian faith, required the use of unlimited means or unrestrained harshness against one's enemy. The end of the Middle Ages did not signal the end of the chivalric code; rather, the Renaissance and Reformation transformed it, incorporating its idealism as an underlying backbone of English public schools and the emergence of the professional military regiment.

## **The Regiment**

Civil-military relations play a crucial role in shaping not only the organizational structure of a military, but also to a large extent its martial spirit. The creation of the British regimental system, by a victorious English parliament recovering from a bloody civil war against the last vestiges of monarchical power, would have a profound impact on English military culture. From the Reformation through most of the eighteenth century, the relationship between civil society and the army, however, was less than cordial.

### **Notes**

<sup>27</sup> Alan Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* (New York: Sheridan House, 1987), 16.

<sup>28</sup> Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War* (Note 16), 79.

The English monarchy, embodying traditional authority, and Parliament, the focus of political power, coexisted uneasily during the Reformation. The existence of a royal army was clearly a focus of contention. “The army’s legal status was never quite clear because the monarch’s traditional right to raise his own guards did not sit well with a fearful parliament which alone could authorize a standing army.”<sup>29</sup> The answer was the development of a strong, but small, regimental militia force under parliamentary control that was apolitical in accepting its subordination to civil government in execution of national defense. However, the creation of such a force would necessitate the recruitment of amateurs, volunteers who had limited or no prior royal service. As regiments formed, the subordinate companier was recruited exclusively from local inhabitants, forming a close-knit organization isolated to a large extent from the larger society it was assigned to protect. While officers still came from the nobility, their loyalty shifted to the regiment, which took on an almost feudal quality. The external apolitical nature of the regiment focused its loyalty internally with the result that regimental honor became of paramount importance.

For a young officer the regiment was family. In many ways it mirrored English public schools in its strict social hierarchy and isolation.<sup>30</sup> And like the public school system, the regiment reflected English society with all its unspoken yet crystal-clear class distinctions and obligations.<sup>31</sup> Regimental officers were exclusively from the upper class, which nurtured the romantic notion of chivalric code embodied in the Victorian definition of a “gentlemen” as a means to distinguish its class from the remainder of society.

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<sup>29</sup> G.W. Stephen Brodsky, *Gentlemen of the Blade: A Social and Literary History of the British Army Since 1600* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 13.

<sup>30</sup> Public schools in England are what Americans would traditionally consider exclusive private institutions.

<sup>31</sup> Brodsky, *Gentlemen of the Blade* (Note 25), 13.

Reflecting this, officers were to be fearless under fire, not to take cover with undue haste—even to bob or weave was considered unmanly and reflected poorly on the honor of the regiment. Aristocratic heritage required that officers perform their duties with effortless grace and without too much serious academic study to the profession. Soldiering itself, from an officer's view, quickly resembled a sport.<sup>32</sup>

As a game, British officers tended to measure their enemy's virtue not by the justness of his cause, but rather in terms of his gamesmanship. Rather than adopting a more serious devotion to technical study, British line officers, buttressed by the social view that infantry and cavalry officers were superior to technical officers, disdained *practical* military education as inappropriate and simply transferred the rules of the school pitch to the battlefield. Fair play on the pitch meant fair play on the battlefield. This transference had the unique effect of making the battlefield impersonal. An enemy whose culture British officers accepted as compatible with their own was considered a worthy opponent, not an object to be annihilated. The enemy, with whom common traits were increasingly identifiable, ceased to be a threat to social stability and thus was to be treated fairly and with professional restraint. This sense of restraint and fair play, however, only transferred to culturally compatible opponents, chiefly other Europeans. Non-white races such as Indians or Africans did not receive the same consideration.

Whereas the British regimental system accentuated chivalric customs, two additional factors contributed to the further development of rules in combat during this period. First, the composition of armies following the treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which defined national sovereignty, radically changed. Armies were now raised and sustained by the state. Governments created supply magazines, fortified frontiers, and managed payment

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 71



systems that gradually reduced the need for foraging as a survival strategy for the individual soldier. Additionally, governments soon realized that the mechanisms of command and control could only be kept functioning under stress if officers scrupulously obeyed set procedures. These rules, influenced by previous failures to curtail employed mercenaries from plundering once the battle had been won, increasingly allotted fixed values to all individuals and groups on the battlefield in addition to imposing strict limits upon the use of violence, now defined as minimum necessary force.<sup>33</sup>

The second factor favoring restraint in the Western conduct of war was that by 1650 the religious frontiers of Europe had largely stabilized. Religious differences ceased to be the predominant motivation for nations to go to war. Nations went to war for more practical reasons, such as territorial acquisition or economic expansion. As the penalty of loss between sovereign states lessened from social survivability to more limited endeavors, nations felt less threatened by war, which translated, as in the Greek city-states, to a greater effort at restraint. “Of course atrocities still occurred, such as the devastation of the Palatinate by forces of Louis XIV in 1688-89; but religion played no part in the process and the chorus of condemnation throughout Europe was all but universal.”<sup>34</sup>

The British regimental system had a profound impact on developing a Western style of war. Warfare as a product of the nationalization of armies and their general isolation from the societies they were sworn to protect fostered a view that war was more sport than national survival. With national hatreds absent or muted, and conduct governed by strict rules of war, hostilities became regulated affairs to such an extent that one observer

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<sup>33</sup> John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 51.

<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey Parker, “Early Modern Europe,” *The Laws of War* (Note 7), 54.

wrote: “Farmers were able to till between the opposing sentries and loaded wagons passed through the picket lines without being bothered.”<sup>35</sup> Building upon this period of limited wars, in which codes of conduct were, at least among European nations, generally accepted, was an upsurge in philosophical debate most often referred to as the Enlightenment.

## **The Enlightenment**

The reformation of Christianity begun by Martin Luther in 1517 challenged the Roman Catholic Church as the only true source of Christian faith. Protestant theology offered new interpretations of faith and challenged traditional Catholic teachings that reflected an effort to solve inherent social and political problems. The reformation contended that religion, as embodied by the Roman Catholic Church, although preaching equality and morality, failed as an institution to live up to its own ideals. To many the bloody European wars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was a direct result of religious intolerance. As such, theologians became increasingly willing to question the church and concluded that religion, including the Protestant faith, could no longer provide a commonly acceptable account of the ways in which man should live.<sup>36</sup>

However, this presented a dilemma for philosophers. Although the Reformation challenged the institution of the church, Europe was, regardless of Protestant or Catholic focus, still Christian. Yet it was impossible to base ethical questions on Christian doctrine since this would rapidly degenerate into heated and unresolvable arguments about religious ideology. The answer for many was the emergence of “natural

### **Notes**

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>36</sup> J.B. Schneewind, *Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.

law.” Natural law was the embodiment of Greek Stoicism, Epicureanism, and emerging physical sciences that offered rules of society without largely referencing Christian doctrine. Coincidentally, its growing popularity in the late sixteenth through eighteenth centuries coincided with the development of the regimental system, designed to be apolitical from traditional sources of monarchical power, which traditionally had been buttressed by the church. As wars of religion faded from the European countryside following the peace at Wetsphalia, naturalist philosophers, replacing the diminutive role of religion in government, carried forward the argument of just war doctrine.

Hugo Grotius’s *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (*On the Law of War and Peace*), published in 1625, exerted a profound influence on the development of international law with respect to both just war doctrine and *jus in bello* theory. Often described as the first “modern” natural law thinker, Grotius strove to make the study of law a discipline that could be pursued without regard to sectarian religious differences. Central to his argument was an acknowledgment that there exists in society natural inalienable laws that each individual possesses, regardless of membership in any group or society. War, in turn, as a function of society, must therefore adhere to strict guidelines both in its justification and conduct. Grotius’ concluded that war must:

... be on both sides made by the Authority of those who in their cities have the sovereign power....That it be waged with such Rites and Formalitie as the Laws of Nations require....The end aim of war being the preservation of life and limb, and the keeping and acquiring of things useful to life, war is in perfect accord with principles of nature...if in order to achieve these ends it is necessary to use force, no inconsistency with principles of nature is involved, since nature has given to each animal the strength for self defense and self assistance.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 100.

Grotius's central thesis asserted that the causes for war were analogous to the causes for civil actions - chiefly, those connected with injury done or offered. Here two points need further clarification. First, while insisting that all wars are defensive, Grotius broadened the category of self-defense to include the justification of taking preemptive offensive action against a state with clear hostile intent. Although he qualified this by stating that the intent must be manifested overtly, "It is...required, that the danger be present and ready instantly to fall upon us."<sup>38</sup>

To traditionalists in the period, Grotius's broadening of the category of self-defense to include the possibility of preemption appeared to be inherently dangerous. Second, although Grotius argued that the right of self-defense extended to the death of the assailant, this right should not be exercised if the danger or harm was relatively minor. Although this notion of proportionality and measured response had previous roots in church doctrine dating back to Augustine, it needed to be reaffirmed outside theology in order to broaden its universality in development of international law and custom.

A singular statement can summarize Grotius' view on *jus in bello*: "Those things that conduce to the End, do receive their true intrinsic value from the End."<sup>39</sup> In other words the ends justify the means. This is not to suggest that Grotius favored wanton violence or raping and pillaging as acceptable conduct in war, neither of which would qualify the war as being just. What Grotius was arguing for is what later theorists would term the "double effect." Aligning with earlier church doctrine, Grotius contended that what is important is intent. If the intent of a military action in pursuit of a just war, for example seizing a bridgehead, necessitated shelling several houses adjacent to the bridge, then while it is

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<sup>38</sup> Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War* (Note 16), 215.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

regrettable that noncombatants may be killed, the importance of capturing the bridge to the *ends* – victory - outweighs the *means*. This principle continues to be understood today in the justification for unintended or collateral damage.

The importance of Grotius's work is that he represented the first real step in shifting just war doctrine from a theological basis to a more universal secular basis. While he may have opened a Pandora's Box by justifying offensive actions based on intent and recognition of the "double effect" as a means to justify collateral damage, he laid the foundation for the later development of a universally accepted legal framework governing war. Grotius laid the foundation for the development of secular laws governing war, a subject that would later be built upon by John Locke.

John Locke's work deserves exploration for three reasons: his contribution to theory of government, specifically to rights thereof; his particular influence on United States governmental theory and to a certain extent her international ideology; and his development of *jus in bello* according to natural principles as elaborated beyond Grotius. To begin, Locke's position on a state's right to go to war, akin to earlier church doctrine, centered on three important points:

...every government is bound, by the law of nature and the conditions of the original compact to preserve its subjects and their properties. The individual's right to make war is given up to the commonwealth with the express limitation that it shall be employed in the defense of the commonwealth from foreign injury.... Nor has any government the right to attack its neighbor's lives, liberties or possessions...The public force of the commonwealth can never be legitimately used to instigate a war on religious grounds.<sup>40</sup>

Note that in defining when a nation may justly wage war, Locke reaffirmed the importance of state sovereignty and governmental rights in relation to those granted to it

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 233.

by the individual citizen. What distinguishes Locke, however, is not his definition of what constitutes a just war, but the code of conduct once hostilities commence.

Although Locke mirrored Grotius in his analogy that war is comparable to civil action, it was his treatise on the definition and rights of noncombatants that distinguishes his work. To Locke, a just defender certainly had the right to punish the guilty and exact reparations, but this right extended no further than to those that were actually guilty: “For the people having given their Governors no power to do an unjust thing, such as to make an unjust war, they ought not to be charged, as guilty of the violence and injustice that is committed in an unjust war.”<sup>41</sup>

If a victorious nation extends its punishment to the innocent, even though they are subjects of the enemy, argued Locke, the just defense becomes an unjust conquest. Thus Locke limited the prosecution of war to allow force only to be directed against an enemy’s government, the agent solely responsible for the war. Additionally, not only should the individual citizenry not be harmed; they also had positive rights in establishing a new government of their choosing, in addition to limiting the spoils taken by a victor if it threatened to undermine their survival.<sup>42</sup> This debate, as to the level of responsibility that a society shared with its government in the initiation of an unjust war, would significantly influence future ethical debates regarding the application of airpower.

The importance of Grotius and Locke to the evolution of just war doctrine can be seen as twofold. First, although both had roots traceable to earlier church doctrine, each attempted to expand the field in an effort to separate the theological from the secular, thereby stressing universality in the application of constraints in war to an emerging

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 236.

international arena. In an age that saw the reduction in the ability of the church to influence the actions of the state, the shift in justifying constraints in warfare based on secular law fostered its continued support in a now religiously diverse Europe. Secondly, both philosophers advanced just war doctrine from the Middle Ages to reflect the political changes inherent in the seventeenth century. For Grotius, this was in modifying the rules as to when a nation could engage in war, the level of proportionality in conducting it, and the secularizing of the principle of “double effect.” Nowhere previously in the just war tradition is Locke’s argument advanced that an enemy’s population has inalienable rights that strictly regulate not only the prosecution of the war, but also its aftermath. Both authors not only contributed to an evolving Western concept of war, they also were transitional figures during an era that witnessed the political and social power of the church being usurped through the emergence of the modern nation-state.

### **The Bigger Stage**

During the twenty three-years from 1792 to 1815, the limited dynastic wars between monarchs so evident during the Enlightenment ended—the wars of the nations began. But did the increase in universal participation so evident in the formation of Napoleon’s Grand Army signal the end of international laws and traditions as the general population, unaccustomed to many of the established traditions of martial service, took to the field? The overall answer is no. This is not to suggest that atrocities on the battlefield did not occur, but that generally the traditional customs governing armed conflict were observed.

While it is true that in May 1794 the French Revolutionary Convention insisted that all prisoners should be shot as an “example of the vengeance of an outraged nation,” it

did not take long for French Army commanders to realize that ill-disciplined troops were no match against professional forces.<sup>43</sup> Combat demanded discipline, which meant that fighting ability and competence were more important than revolutionary dogma. By 1795 professional commanders, regulars, and citizen soldiers—turned—neoprofessional reasserted control of the military returning to many of the traditional customs between soldiers.

However the adherence to traditional customs governing war was not universal, the Russian invasion of 1812 saw atrocities being committed on both sides. Exhausted Russian prisoners were shot when they became a burden during the French retreat from Moscow, while captured French soldiers were brutally abused and often made “the sport and victims of the Russian peasantry.”<sup>44</sup> The adherence to traditional rules governing combat was arbitrary based on practicality and cultural compatibility. As such, the Wars of Revolution mirrored the Greek experience in which traditions were generally followed if the adversaries were culturally compatible as in the case between the Austrians and French who shared traditional European cultural attitudes and beliefs in addition to Catholicism. When the adversary was less similar as in the case of the Russians, who seemed more Asiatic than European and had a strong Greek Orthodox tradition, rules governing action in combat were followed less consistently.

By and large there is adequate evidence to support the contention that, despite the expanded scale of warfare during the Age of the French Revolution and Napoleon, longer in duration, and with the war effort much more broadly based, there remained substantial continuities with the traditional customs restraining war.<sup>45</sup> Albeit on a larger stage, wars were still fought for the most part between established disciplined military units that still

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<sup>43</sup> Gunther Rothenberg, “Age of Napoleon”, *The Laws of War* (Note 7) 89.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.



cultivated images of glory and honor. There were of course exceptions, particularly between the French and Russian forces, however the basic validity of traditional customs and laws were not directly challenged.

## Conclusions

*I suppose if there is no question, then there is no answer.*

—Gertrude Stein

So what does it all mean? This chapter has traced the evolution of just war doctrine and *jus in bello* for one specific reason: to illustrate the ethical roots of the Western view of war. As such, this chapter offers two preliminary conclusions. First, on the subject of morality, there are those who believe that it does not matter what general theory of ethics one clings to— so far as determining one’s actions in particular cases. After all, two individuals from similar ethical environments will, at times, make two completely different decisions. But this is not evidence that cultural morality is irrelevant to ethical problems; it only underlines what should already be apparent: that factors other than one’s cultural background play a role in determining individual actions. However, that ethical considerations are not the only thing relevant is no evidence that it is irrelevant. We are all ultimately shaped and influenced by our culture.

Second, is there a distinct Western way of war? Embracing the recent global village theory, critics contend that, regardless of culture, on most issues individuals exhibit a remarkable commonality in viewpoint. Anyone who has compared, for instance, differences in Eastern and Western philosophy on something as basic as the passage of time note that there is cultural distinctness in individual outlook. War is no different.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 97.

With that said, what does the evolution of just war doctrine demonstrate in regard to a Western view of war? In many ways one can see the influence of Locke, Augustine, and even the ancient Greeks on a child's playground. This is not to suggest that war is akin to play, but ultimately war like a playground game, is a contest of wills governed by self imposed rules. We are taught to fight fairly and within the bounds of those rules. To venture outside by cheating or taking undue advantage is culturally discouraged. The same holds true for the actions of Western soldiers.

The legacy of the Greeks, church doctrine, the British regimental system, and the Enlightenment have all contributed to the development of a Western ethos regarding war. Soldiers are taught to limit violence to the minimum necessary and in proportion to the threat. Soldiers may only kill soldiers; a child aiming an AK-47 at a US infantryman or the bombing of an Iraqi military bunker that also housed civilians causes Westerners to pause, and in some cases alters the way a war is prosecuted. In examining the legacies from this chapter, one can reach several generalizations regarding a traditional Western view of war:

- War is essentially used as a problem solving tool;
- Identifiable soldiers under strict command and control fight war;
- Collateral damage is to be avoided unless necessary for the prosecution of the just war. Even then, it must be limited proportionally to the importance of the objective; and
- The rights of the individual must be protected. War is not made on the wounded or unarmed. A surrendered enemy is protected.

Granted, these rules have been broken at times, but they continue to be the ideal that Western culture strives for when prosecuting war. What is also unique is that the viability and determination to follow these guidelines have depended largely on two conditions:

- Traditionally, if the adversaries shared a common cultural foundation, as in case of the Greeks or Europeans, rules restraining actions on the battlefield were generally followed. The Crusades, European campaigns in the New World and in Africa, and the atrocities committed during Napoleon's Russian offensive offer stark testimony that adherence to constraints in war have traditionally been extremely biased; and
- The greater the threat to a state's continued existence, the less tendency to adhere to limitations in combat. This was evident during the Peloponnesian Wars and Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

The intent of this chapter has been to examine the European foundation upon which the American view of war was built. Regardless of a tradition of independence, America's cultural history was strongly influenced by Western European norms. Therefore, it was necessary to first explore the common road of Western cultural thought on war prior to diverging down the American path. With the Western view established, it is now time to venture across the Atlantic to the New World.

## Chapter 3

### The American Perspective

*To be an American is of itself almost a moral condition, an education, and a career.*

—George Santayana

The spark and evolution of a culture does not occur within a vacuum. Geography, politics, economic realities, and the size of a population all share a role in fostering how a culture thinks or reacts to the world around it. The European colonists, who established settlements along the North Atlantic seaboard, naturally brought with them European, specifically English, cultural beliefs. However, being separated from their paternal home by the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean, the colonists soon began to develop their own value systems influenced by their unique environment. This chapter will explore American cultural beliefs regarding the conduct of war.

With that said, it is important that we understand the connection between the Western, that is European, way of war, as examined in the last chapter, and the emerging American perspective. While the radically different environment of the American frontier would naturally shape a unique culture, America's dominant culture, regardless of her patriotic beliefs, is largely European. English traditions of chivalry, just war philosophy, and the role of combatants would carry across the Atlantic, providing the foundation

upon which American beliefs would be built. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the variations. As such, this chapter will focus on addressing four questions:

- How did the physical environment shape American beliefs in the totality of war?
- Does American culture tend to strictly classify issues as good or evil, right or wrong? To what extent does this classification effect her ability to prosecute war?
- Does American culture glorify technology? Does this adversely effect her conception of war?
- What role do democratic ideologies play in America's willingness to wage war?

### **Shifts in the Strategic Environment**

Historians have long debated the influence of the frontier upon the development of American culture. While there has been a certain tendency, especially in literature, to exaggerate the image of the frontier skirmisher and his effect on the development of American beliefs regarding war, it would be wrong to suggest that this environment did not have an impact. Cultural beliefs continually evolve and shift as the result of changes in the environment. The New World certainly provided an impetus for change.

From the outset, English colonists viewed Native Americans as an alien people and realized that their knowledge of the land and how to move across it would make them formidable opponents if hostilities should break out.<sup>46</sup> Given the ethnocentric nature of the early colonists, further fueled by competition over natural resources, conflict between the two cultures was inevitable. The settlers had to face the paradox that while they held Native American culture in contempt, they could not directly counter Indian actions because the natives refused to offer battle that would give advantage to European tactics

or firearm technology. In the words of one Virginia settler, the natives were a “naked and cowardly” people because they would “dare not stand the presentment of a staff in manner of a piece (a musket), nor an uncharged piece in the hands of a woman, from which they fly as so many hares.”<sup>47</sup>

Although cultural hubris and lack of familiarity with the terrain led a few colonists afoul in combating Indian warriors outside the protection of the settlement, those who saw first hand the military abilities of the Indians appreciated how formidable an enemy they could be. Since the colonists did not have the military skills or numbers to force the natives to fight a European-style battle, “they adopted a strategy the Virginians called a “feedfight” - that is, a strategy aimed at destroying the enemy’s food supply, thus using famine as a means to eradicate the Indian population.”<sup>48</sup> The war between the Indians and the colonists was a no-holds barred affair that did not discriminate between combatants and the innocent on either side. The frontier was not an environment in which the isolated Englishmen could relax his vigilance or eschew opportunities to destroy the Indians. They took the actions they did knowing that not all their countrymen back home would understand the particular circumstances which prompted them to act with more ferocity and ruthlessness than what was thought to be appropriate for Christian civilized Englishmen.<sup>49</sup> The severity of the threat compounded by the isolation of frontier life and the belief that the Indians were less than human fostered an attitude along the frontier that security could only be achieved through the complete annihilation of the Indian threat.

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<sup>46</sup> Harold E. Selesky, “Colonial America,” *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World*, ed. Michael Howard, George J. Andreopoulos, and Mark R. Shulman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 62.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 66.

Often this simply translated to the annihilation of the Indians, regardless of the threat they presented.

To say, however, that the American colonists abandoned the traditions of *jus in bello* would be an exaggeration. If it was common to consider the Indians outside the protection of the Christian laws of war, the colonists nevertheless largely acknowledged those laws as applicable to warfare when fought against European adversaries. General George Washington, as commander of the Continental Army, “accepted European tutelage in virtually every respect, including the tactical training of his troops, respect for the rights of combatants and noncombatants under the international law of war, and most certainly in strategy.”<sup>50</sup>

The Continental Army was organized and led by Washington with the British regimental system clearly in mind. Both the American colonists and the English realized that brutality and terrorization on and, especially, away from the battlefield would erode support for their causes both at home and abroad. However, the scale of the theater of operations complicated centralized command and control. A distinguishing feature of the American Revolution was the fact that the Americans fielded all manner and size of units in support of the main European-style army, many of which were outside the control of senior military commanders.<sup>51</sup> Although Washington rejected the counsel of Major General Charles Lee, who advocated a guerrilla style irregular war by tapping popular

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<sup>50</sup> Russell F. Weigley, “American Strategy,” *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 410.

<sup>51</sup> Harold E. Selesky, “Colonial America” *The Laws of War* (Note 1), 81.

support, he could not control the activities of local militias outside his sphere of operations.<sup>52</sup>

If Washington lacked confidence in his militias due to “their undependability, lack of discipline, perceived cowardice under fire,” the British viewed the rebel militias as the “most troublesome and predictable element in a confusing war.”<sup>53</sup> Small groups of rebel irregulars could quickly form and achieve local superiority against any loyalist militia, resorting to fear and intimidation to hold the civilian population in check.<sup>54</sup> Areas which the British thought to have pacified quickly slipped out of their control, sometimes because loyalist militia forces fought their own little wars of counter-terror against rebels, rebel-sympathizers, suspects, and anyone else they disliked. While there were standards in which both sides could model the conduct of armies, there were fewer conventions that could be used to restrain the myriad of forces in the irregular campaigns being conducted within the southern theater due to the numerous militia groups operating in the area.

Although irregular militias continued to vie against each other on a localized scale, the Washington–led Continental Army would ultimately provide the instrument through which independence was achieved. Washington’s vision of a professional army embodied by the Continental Army would later shape the first president’s thinking in defining the United States Army as a governmental institution.<sup>55</sup> Although kept relatively small due to

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<sup>52</sup> For a closer examination see Russell F. Weigley, “American Strategy” in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*.

<sup>53</sup> John Shy, *Essays on the American Revolution*, ed. Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), 148.

<sup>54</sup> It must be remembered, contrary to myth, that the American revolution was also in many ways a civil war providing the incentive and opportunity for both rebels and loyalists to settle domestic disputes. The population was not universally supportive of the rebel cause.

<sup>55</sup> Russell F. Weigley, “American Strategy” in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Note 5), 411. Interestingly enough, as Weigley further points out: “Whenever after the Revolution, the American army had to conduct a counterguerrilla campaign—in the Second Seminole War of 1835-1841, the Filipino Insurrection of 1899-1903, and in Vietnam in 1965-1973 – it found itself without an



a traditional American distrust of a powerful centralized government that could jeopardize individual liberties through the use of a strong military, the US Army modeled itself on European standards, including adopting many beliefs of their English regimental counterparts.

The Civil War in many ways signaled a transition in the American view of war. While a detailed study of the causes and ramifications of the Civil War is beyond the scope of this study, several observations can be made. On the eve of the Civil War, the United States, already one of the most populous countries of the Western world with more than 30 million inhabitants, was also the least militarized. However, her regular army went from a force of roughly 16,000 in 1861 to nearly 400,000 men under arms by August 1862.<sup>56</sup> The vast numbers that swelled the ranks did not have the luxury of time to devote to the extensive drilling that marked the professional regimental system in Europe. Recognizing this, General Ulysses S. Grant knew that the war would be won not by employing a West Point strategy of evasion, blockade, or maneuver, but by straight-up fighting using the North's superior logistical capability to overpower an industrially weaker South.

The American Civil War was a total war in the strictest sense. Epitomizing the nature of the struggle, Grant realized as early as Shiloh that Confederate troops fought not out of bravado, but of conviction, and that the only way the Union was to be made whole was by defeating them utterly.<sup>57</sup> Writing in 1863, Grant argued that the war must achieve "the total subjugation of the south" and that the army's duty was "therefore to use every

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institutional memory of such experiences, having to relearn appropriate tactics at exorbitant costs, and yet tended after each episode to regard it as an aberration that need not be repeated." Russell F. Weigley, "American Strategy" *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Note 5), 411.

<sup>56</sup> John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York: Viking, 1987), 189.

means to weaken the enemy.”<sup>58</sup> Grant did not believe that the destruction of the South could be achieved in a single Napoleonic-style battle in which an entire campaign could be decided; “the armies of the Civil War were too big, too resilient, too thoroughly sustained by the will of democratic governments for that.”<sup>59</sup> If this war were to be won, it would be through the elimination of the South’s ability to wage war.

In his work entitled *The American Way of War*, Russell Weigley argues that the Civil War ushered in a unique “American way of war” that relied on firepower and massive use of force to overwhelm as opposed to outmaneuver an enemy. This philosophy, born from a Civil War characterized by advancements in weaponry and logistical capabilities such as the advent of the telegraph and the railroad, has epitomized American military culture throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The American military became comfortable in fighting a war of attrition.

Several concurrent themes can be drawn from the influence of environment in shaping the development of an initial American cultural view of war. The first is that, given the severity of the threat and the sense of isolation within the frontier settlements, traditional European notions of *jus in bello* were not applied against an Indian population which represented to the colonists a direct threat to their very existence. This mirrors a common trend within Western culture that as the level of cost in losing rises, the willingness to adhere to limitations in the conduct of war diminishes.

A second unusual theme is that while the Continental Army under Washington developed into a professional military akin to their British counterparts, its role once

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Russell F. Weigley, “American Strategy” *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Note 5) 432.

independence had been won was diminished in favor of the citizen-soldier militia. Yet, as an institution, the local militias during the Revolutionary war often proved both uncontrollable and indiscriminate in their actions. This presents an interesting dichotomy of American culture. On the one side is the cultural belief that an established military would threaten the liberties of the individual. Yet local militias, both loyalist and rebel, at times fail to abide by orthodox traditions, such as the protection of noncombatants.

But perhaps the most dominant characteristic that evolved within early American culture with regard to the conduct of war was the willingness, given a threat to national security, to fight a war of attrition. While both sides in the Civil War generally followed traditional western constraints in war, such as the acceptance of surrender and, for the most part, protection of non-combatants, the Union slowly realized that the South's large indigenous support base across the Confederacy enabled her to survive the loss of a decisive battle. This necessitated a shift in focus to not only the defeat of Southern fielded forces, but also her ability to wage war. Bolstered by the industrial revolution and a tremendous resource base in the northeast, the Union adopted the seemingly traditional American proclivity to overwhelm an enemy through sheer firepower and numerical superiority. This trait is still an integral part of American military culture today. The problem is that this strategy only works when faced with a smaller adversary and one willing to play by traditional rules. It is difficult to overwhelm an enemy that does not have established defenses to target.

## **Black and White**

American culture, although influenced by the diverse ethnic traditions of its populace, is remarkably distinct. Compared with other nations, America's population is

considerable, though it is spread rather thinly over a huge amount of territory, most of which is still relatively unsettled. America has a short history, one that is even shorter if viewed from the perspective of world history. “Whereas occupational and ethnic interests divide her people in opinion,” they share a remarkably small range of “standard moral, political, economic, and social attitudes.”<sup>60</sup> The moral tone of the country is largely Christian, although a puritanic morality has become a generalized and secular part of the culture rather than a code of any single religious sect.<sup>61</sup>

Remarkably, for all her ethnic diversity, Americans share a seemingly common trait - the tendency to make distinctive value judgments, choosing from alternatives they characterize as dichotomous extremes. In other words, Americans rarely see the world as “gray”.

American culture is exceptionally linear. Most, if not all decisions can be neatly classified as right/wrong, moral/immoral, legal/illegal, success/failure, civilized/savage, developed /undeveloped, Christian/pagan. While other religions and cultures often allow opposites to coexist on an equal footing, such as in Taoism or Buddhism, Americans tend to rank one side as superior, accepting it on principle, while ranking the other as inferior and rejecting it on principle. While this linear focus can be a source of great strength, it also presents pitfalls in America’s ability to understand the world around her, especially in times of conflict. This section will examine several manifestations of this American cultural trait, specifically focusing on how they effect her cultural outlook towards waging war.

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<sup>60</sup> Conrad M. Arensberg and Arthur H. Niehoff, *Introducing Social Change: A Manual for Americans Overseas* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1964), 157.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

The cultural trait of making distinctive value judgments is perhaps no more evident in the American concept of work and play. To most Americans, work is what they do regularly, even grimly, whether they enjoy it or not. Work is viewed as a necessary obligation or duty (or evil) that must be accomplished prior to pursuing more enjoyable activities. However work, as a duty, is also purposeful. To a large degree an individual is judged by his work. Progress towards completion of the objective is seen as a positive indication of worth, whereas stagnation implies laziness and waste. Play is different. It is fun, generally without purpose, but ultimately beholden to the completion of work. Work and play are considered in American culture to be two different worlds; there is a time and place for each; but when it is time for work, then play and the lighter pursuits must be put aside.<sup>62</sup>

This view carries over to a large degree to the American concept of war. The United States has historically drawn a sharp distinction between war and peace, traditionally insisting that they be defined as mutually exclusive.<sup>63</sup> Americans view peace as the natural desired order between states. War, akin to work, is not viewed as a road to glory, but as a regrettable necessity to be discharged as quickly as possible so that “normal” occupations may be resumed. Thus Americans, once provoked into war want to adopt an “all or nothing” approach. This view, combined with the American tendency to see the US position as absolutely right and the adversary’s as absolutely wrong, fosters a mindset within the American public that not only typically demonizes an enemy, but also molds the campaign into a moral crusade. This has an added effect in supporting the Western

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>63</sup> Wray R. Johnson, *From Counterinsurgency to Stability and Support Operations: The evolution of U.S. Military Doctrine for Foreign Internal Conflict, 1961 – 1996*. Ph.D. Dissertation, 344.

cultural concept of military necessity as embodied in the principle of “double effect” as discussed in the previous chapter.

This parallel between work and play and war and peace also influences the American perception of time and progress. In general, American time is exact, people are punctual, activities are scheduled, and time is apportioned for separate activities. In essence, to Americans, time is money. The equating of work with time, “using the least amount of time to produce the largest possible quantity,” and the expectation “that the time people are paid is marked by sustained effort towards an established objective,” are all central features of the American industrial economy and her culture.<sup>64</sup> If America is forced to engage in hostilities, then, from a cultural aspect, the war must visibly progress, without periods of perceived stagnation, towards an established objective. Failure to do so will generally result in diminished public support for the venture.

There is widespread belief in the world that Americans will only support military operations that promise minimal casualties and quick resolution. This view is somewhat shortsighted. It is not that Americans will not engage in long, bloody conflicts - the

Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and World War II were all protracted and bloody affairs - but that Americans are “anti-stalemate.” The rapid reevaluation of US strategies in Lebanon following the bombing of the US Marine barracks resulting in 241 dead, and in Somalia following the Mogadishu firefight that left 18 servicemen dead, was not the result of a weakness in American will or the “CNN effect.” The reevaluation and

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<sup>64</sup> Arensberg, *Introducing Social Change* (Note 15), 162.

eventual withdrawal in both situations, was the result of the lack of a coherent and credible strategy to obtain operational objectives.<sup>65</sup>

Another aspect of American culture regarding the conduct of work and war is associated with the level of effort and optimism. Effort to Americans is considered good in itself and with effort one can be optimistic about success.<sup>66</sup> The cultural values connected with effort and activity add to the American belief that “it is better to do something than to sit back and do nothing.” Americans typically believe that any problem can be solved with the right amount of effort and dedication. This aspect of American culture was strongly evident in the US advisory role in South Vietnam. Frustrated that the South Vietnamese were not adopting the American cultural norm that advocated an adherence to an established programmatic method in order to measurably advance towards an agreed end-state and peace, “the US [simply] took over the war at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.”<sup>67</sup> In concrete terms this meant the US took over the counterinsurgency war and applied her full arsenal of conventional weaponry in an effort to reach a settlement, regardless of the wisdom of such an effort.

The tendency of Americans to cloak principles in absolute definitions occasionally clouds her ability to effectively understand and manage problems, such as foreign internal conflicts, that cannot be fixed with a simple application of effort and programmatic method. The American cultural belief that peace is the normal condition imposes this belief on foreign nations.

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<sup>65</sup> Andrew P. N. Erdmann, “The U.S. Presumption of Quick, Costless Wars,” *Orbis*, no.3 (Summer 1999): 363-81.

<sup>66</sup> Arensberg, *Introducing Social Change: A Manual for Americans Overseas* (Note 15), 165.

<sup>67</sup> Wray R. Johnson, *From Counterinsurgency to Stability and Support Operations* (Note 18), 349.

However not all men desire peace. Being a warlord offers far more advantage to some men than being a ditch digger, regardless of the oppression necessary to maintain power. The view that peace is a desired state of all nations often leads to a US strategy that advocates placing military or economic pressure on the totalitarian regime or the placement of peacekeepers as a means to ensure the return of stability within the disputed region. However, when peace is not quickly achieved, American public support begins to wane as a consequence of perceived mismanagement. “The effect is to constrain [US] policy-makers to establish ‘windows’ of intervention with clearly articulated ‘end-states’.”<sup>68</sup> The difficulty is that not all problems can be neatly boiled down to definable solutions.

Given America’s proclivity to frame issues in absolutes, it is not surprising that this trait influences the way that she wages war. Americans prefer a stand-up fight. Deception and trickery is something that the colonists claimed they left in a corrupt Europe and despised in the Indian. When one combines the elements of American society – democratic ideals that reward direct participation and straightforwardness, the belief that “time is money”, and the mythical heritage of the old west where the sheriff faces the villain openly in the street, all of which are supported by a Western cultural tradition trailing back to the Greek phalanx – it is hard to imagine America fighting differently. However, this characterization does not imply, as the occasional critic of American military strategy suggests, that the US military is reluctant to conduct wars of maneuver. McArthur’s landing at Inchon and the left hook employed in Operation Desert Storm serve as recent examples. To put it simply, there is a difference between maneuver and sneaking.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 343.



It is always dangerous to attempt to define universal cultural traits, especially given a nation that glorifies individuality. While events may momentarily alter a nation's character or add to its cultural outlook, each society is constructed on a foundation of beliefs that serve to define its people and nation. America is no different. Reinforcing Western cultural traditions of *jus in bello*, American culture adds absolutism, focus of effort, and the belief that peace is the natural state of nations. Another thing that American culture adds to the Western way of war is a fondness for technology.

### **Gadgets and Gizmos**

*Where does he get those amazing toys?*

—Jack Nicholson portraying the villainous  
Joker in the film “Batman”, 1989

Through determination and effort, Americans generally believe that almost any problem or obstacle can be overcome, including nature. For a significant period of her history, many Americans believed that the “natural environment was something to be overcome, improved upon, or torn down in order to pave a better way.”<sup>69</sup> This conquering attitude towards nature, a seemingly constant trait in American culture, rests on the fundamental assumption that the universe is mechanistic and man, through his ingenuity, is its master. The difference in the American experience is not the assumption of this philosophy, but the necessity and willingness to implement it.

By 1860, the United States, after Britain, formed the second largest manufacturing nation in the world, and had far outstripped any other country in the development of

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<sup>69</sup> Arensberg, *Introducing Social Change* (Note 15), 169.

machines to do the jobs previously undertaken by skilled workers.<sup>70</sup> Before the end of the nineteenth century America would surpass Great Britain. America's love for machinery originated largely out of necessity given her expanse of territory and comparatively small population base in the early nineteenth century. To attract men to work in the new factories it was necessary to pay high wages, which, in an effort to keep product prices competitive, meant that productivity needed to be increased. Thus machines and centralized production methods were adopted to multiply the productivity of the worker.

Additionally, America lacked a well-organized class of craftsmen who might have looked upon mechanization as a threat to their traditional way of life. Eli Whitney, one of the early American pioneers of mass-production methods, perhaps captured this movement toward machines best, stating that the purpose was "to substitute correct and efficient operation of machinery for that skill of the artist which is acquired only by long practice and experience; a species of skill which is not possessed in this country to any considerable extent."<sup>71</sup> Thus did America, long before anyone else, for good or bad, find herself pushed into a dependence on a machine-based industry. Technological progress gave the American cultural philosophy of productive effort material form.

Having secured victory in the Civil War through industrial might that introduced revolutionary technological changes upon the battlefield, the United States increasingly began to rely on a military strategy that emphasized mechanized firepower. The American contribution to the First World War only heightened this belief. American General Tasker H. Bliss, as a member of the Allied Supreme War Council, commented in 1923 that the First World War "signified virtually the end of the age of the strategist and

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<sup>70</sup> John Ellis, *The Social History of the Machine Gun* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975), 21.

the confirmation of the arrival of the age of war as a mere mechanical trial of the ability of rival coalitions to generate armies and material.”<sup>72</sup> However, the horrors of trench warfare had not only brought to the postwar theorists the realization that war had become a bloody contest of resources rather than strategy, but also that technology, epitomized in the airplane, offered a degree of maneuverability and firepower that could break the stalemate of attrition warfare.

The interwar period saw the emergence of airpower doctrine on both sides of the Atlantic. While a discussion of emerging airpower theory is not the purpose of this section, several themes from the American approach to airpower employment are notable. American interwar doctrine regarding the employment of airpower centered on the strategy of strategic industrial bombing with the objective of denying an enemy the capability and, to a certain degree the will to continue waging war. While there continues to be significant debate as to the effectiveness and morality of the US bombing campaigns against Germany and Japan, it must be remembered that, at the time, the possibility of achieving victory through the air offered the promise of not only shortening the war, but more importantly reducing casualties. This philosophy, that technology and airpower could prevent protracted bloody wars of attrition, was reinforced by the emergence of the atomic bomb and Cold War nuclear deterrence strategy.

The ability to produce and field technologically sophisticated weapons that provide great firepower, combined with the tradition of overwhelming our enemies, has produced

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>72</sup> Russell F. Weigley, “American Strategy” *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Note 5), 441.

a significant trend in American military culture.<sup>73</sup> American strategists have increasingly opted for technological solutions in hopes of satisfying the apparent cultural desire for a quick solution to military crises. As a result, the American people accepted the traditional justification that collateral damage and deaths were a regrettable byproduct born of the military necessity to strike enemy targets. However, with the widespread publicized use of precision guided ordnance in the Gulf War, the American public has increasingly come to expect that, given the apparent high degree of precision visibly demonstrated in Iraq, America now has the capability to target so selectively that collateral damage and casualties across the battlefield, both friend and foe, can be avoided. Precision weapons technology has, for many Americans, come to symbolize the biblical hand of God that is not only all-powerful, but more importantly, discriminate. The genesis of which, for many, lay in the Gulf War air campaign.

At 4:30 a.m. on February 13, 1991, US forces struck a bunker complex in the suburbs of Baghdad. The Al Firdos bunker was believed by Coalition intelligence to house Iraqi command and control personnel. Unfortunately, that night it also held civilians who bore the brunt of the assault. Iraq used these civilian deaths as a propaganda tool to illustrate US atrocities committed against innocent civilians. However, the after effect of the bombing did not as a whole adversely affect the resolve of the American public. In fact, 79 percent of Americans polled believed that Saddam Hussein and Iraq were responsible for the civilian deaths by allowing them access to the bunker.<sup>74</sup> What was unique was the effect of this event on US political and military decision-making.

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<sup>73</sup> Dennis M. Drew and Donald N. Snow, *The Eagles Talons* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1988), 395.

<sup>74</sup> Ronald H. Hinckley *People, Polls, and Policymakers* (New York: Lexington Books, 1992), 116.

Granted, US leaders knew that in war, regardless of how clean precision weapons seemed to be, innocent casualties are bound to occur. While US leaders believed that the destruction of Iraqi leadership targets was something the country could accept and even endorse, the killing of innocent women and children, displayed vividly on television, was quite a different matter. While US leaders may have underestimated the American tolerance for bloodshed given a justified cause, the net result was that, following the bombing, air targets in Baghdad were off-limits unless specifically approved at the highest levels. The air planners had lost a great deal of their operational freedom.

What makes this episode unique is that it could be viewed as a microcosm of American cultural beliefs concerning conduct in war. America is willing to accept casualties in war if the action is one of military necessity and if the cause of the conflict is just. The US military while certainly capable of continuing the bombing in Baghdad was concerned that in an age where precision weaponry was believed to finally allow target discrimination, repeated episodes of Al Firdos might jeopardize both US public resolve and the morale of the armed forces. Americans simply did not make war on innocents and, from a public perception, technology allowed the military to be selective in its attacks. US bombing raids in Kosovo offer vivid illustrations that, in a conflict which remains far more controversial, the US public was far less willing to tolerate collateral deaths, especially given the *perceived* level of US technical ability. Technology, while seemingly the mantra for US efforts at reducing bloodshed, is still subject to *jus in bello*. When you remove military necessity granted through a justifiable war, you heighten, due to perceived technological capabilities, the requirement that it be waged cleanly.

America's love affair with technology started at an early age. Limited population forced mechanical ingenuity that would become an American cultural legacy. Yet in war this love of technology has become a double-edged sword. While granting an unmatched capability to dominate the traditional field of battle, it has also fostered the notion that there exists a technical solution to virtually every problem, whether one exists or not. While precision weapons grant unprecedented accuracy, they also create the demand not only to follow the written laws governing the conduct of war, but also the spirit behind those laws. In so doing, advanced weaponry may define not only how America fights, but also when she fights.

### **The Democratic Way**

*We will not repudiate our duty....We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee under God, of the civilization of the world....We will move forward in our work...with thanksgiving to Almighty God that He has marked us as his chosen people, henceforth to lead in the regeneration of the world.*

—Senator Albert J. Beveridge  
Senate oratory following U.S. victory over Spain

“Land of the free and home of the brave.” Perhaps no other phrase so captures American idealism. Although history gives evidence that reality often fails to measure up to the dream, most Americans still cherish a belief in egalitarianism. The fundamental principles upon which America was founded, along with mass immigration and frontier life, represented a huge experiment in social leveling. America's legal and institutional heritage “prescribes equal rights, condemns special privileges, and demands equal opportunity and representation for every citizen.”<sup>75</sup> Most Americans are generally uncomfortable with inequality based on hereditary status or special privilege. American

liberalism stands firmly on equality and repudiates the right of any individual to wield power over another. From its rural roots, America regards the liberty of the individual as “a positive fact implying both effort and responsibility.”<sup>76</sup>

A significant portion of the world, however, is comprised of societies that are hierarchically organized with distinct caste differences. Faced with what it sees as subordination, deference, and oppression of individual liberty, American public sentiment has traditionally swelled with sympathy for the trodden “underdog” to the point that spurs intervention. Yet this very humanitarian impulse has also created a paradox for US strategists. For example, the national security impetus for US intervention in Vietnam was the containment of communism. Unfortunately in an effort to achieve this end, America was obligated to uphold regimes that, while anti-communist, were also unpopular and repressive, contradicting American values founded on individual liberty. This served to prolong the insurgency.<sup>77</sup>

This ideological paradox has beset American leadership from the introduction of the Monroe Doctrine, although the internal debate on American imperialism gathered steam, largely following the adoption of the expansionist philosophy of Manifest Destiny. In essence the American concept of Manifest Destiny, akin to the Spanish conquests that were driven in part by the desire to “spread the word of Christ to the savages,” simply substituted the concept of democracy for religion. As compelling the desire to push the frontier might have been, however, wars fought in its behalf have traditionally been unpopular ones. Territorial expansion in the Mexican War, tied as it was to the political

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<sup>75</sup> Arensberg, *Introducing Social Change: A Manual for Americans Overseas* (Note 15), 178.

<sup>76</sup> A.L. Rowse, *Woodrow Wilson and American Liberalism* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948), 273.

<sup>77</sup> Johnson, *From Counterinsurgency to Stability and Support Operations*. (Note 18), 342.

debate as to the extension of slavery, generated support only in the West; whereas US activity in Korea and Vietnam in pursuit of containing communism similarly had limited appeal.<sup>78</sup> Simply put, American culture is schizophrenic on this subject: while we ideologically support the right of the individual to democratic ideals, from a practical standpoint we have also often supported oppressive governments with pro-American policies.

The desire to bring “liberty to the world” also influences US field operations and strategy. Given a philosophy that assumes that societies not only desire peace, but also democracy, the US often attempts through psychological warfare either to incite the local populace to rebel against an established regime or for the warring sides to lay down their arms under an American umbrella of neutrality. The difficulty is that conflicts such as in Bosnia and Kosovo are not motivated by a desire to embrace democratic ideals, but by a deeply embedded cycle of violence that divides along ethnic lines. Thus it is often difficult for the US to adequately target efforts to minimize the bloodshed, yet the motivation to “do something” to aid the plight of a beleaguered local population still exists. The result is a tendency for the US, as in Lebanon, not to adequately understand the underlying social tensions that feed the conflict, and thus strategies are ill directed and often places US soldiers directly in the line of fire.

Another related democratic influence that shapes the way in which America prepares for and prosecutes war is the traditional reluctance to support overarching institutions in fear of jeopardizing the rights of the individual. The bedrock of the American belief structure is individual liberty. Not surprisingly, most Americans embrace the view that regular standing armies are instruments of tyranny and pose a threat to democracy. As an

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<sup>78</sup> Drew and Snow, *The Eagles Talons* (Note 28), 374.



alternative, the idea that “citizen-soldiers were the safest form of defense, since they had no reason to deprive themselves of their liberties,” was endorsed through the Constitution.<sup>79</sup> The implicit fear that the military might influence politics has produced a military establishment that is largely apolitical and even anti-political in some respects.

The apolitical nature of the US military has both positive and negative connotations. On the positive side, “civil-military relations are based on the principle of civilian dominance of the military and that tenet is firmly and fully accepted by the military.”<sup>80</sup> While members of the military may at times question the competence of their leaders, they never question their authority. An apolitical military, however, has a price. Bereft of political involvement in designing grand strategy, the US has traditionally focused on training leaders in the more technical aspects of the craft. By emphasizing the technical aspects of conducting war, study in the softer sciences of military history and international politics that provide the context for military operations (the so-called “art of war”) is lessened. The result is a general lack of appreciation of the relationship between politics and war that restricts the ability of the military to provide advice outside the technical field. While the services are trying to change this with the recent emphasis on expanding officer education, it will take time to change the institutional culture.

The ideals of liberty and individual rights are a powerful component of American ideology. With the end of the Cold War, the influence of America’s ideology in shaping her perception of the world has increased. While it is unlikely that the US will adopt a

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<sup>79</sup> Peter Maslowski, “To the Edge of Greatness: The United States, 1783-1865,” *The Making of Strategy*, ed. Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 212.

<sup>80</sup> Drew and Snow, *The Eagles Talons* (Note 28), 373.

publicized doctrine akin to Manifest Destiny, there is a significant call to chase its spirit.

Malcolm Wallop, a Republican senator from Wyoming, perhaps captures this notion best:

“The United States has grown and matured into a world leader – and not merely a leader, but a force in the world for positive good. As a result we have a responsibility first and above all to our own liberty and independence, but to an extent also to the rest of the world. Can a great nation simply shrug off its responsibilities? How do we feel about a father who deserts his children or a policeman who ignores a cry for help?”<sup>81</sup>

Being a “force for positive good” not only requires compliance with Western laws of *jus in bello*, but given the perceived power of America as the remaining superpower, also pressures her to become the world’s policeman. While this has the positive effect of placing America on the moral high ground, it has far more negative connotations in terms of credibility, and also may highlight America as the champion to perceived Western cultural imperialism.

## Mixing

One must always be cautious when attempting to define cultural beliefs, especially with respect to a nation that prides itself on its cultural heritage of diversity. Yet, like any other nation or group, there are certain tendencies, for lack of a better word, that emerge as a result of group dynamics that are based on environmental factors and shared history. This chapter has attempted to shed light on the American perspective of war by highlighting four general topics: the physical environment from which American culture developed, the tendency of that culture to make dichotomous judgments concerning issues of principle, the role of technology, and the influences of democratic idealism.

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<sup>81</sup> Malcolm Wallop, *America’s Purpose: New Visions for U.S. Foreign Policy*, ed. Owen Harries (San Francisco: ICS Press: 1991), 98.

The study of strategic culture is difficult given its inherent ability to change and the myriad of variables involved in its conception. With that said, one can distinguish traditional fundamental beliefs from momentary shifts in outlook. The purpose of chapters two and three in this work was to explore the cultural heritage that has shaped the American perception of war. Given this outlook, it may now be possible to sketch American beliefs concerning war in terms that will serve both as an interim summary and a model from which other conclusions can be drawn.

Mythology plays a unique role in a nation's ethnic heritage and culture. Myths, regardless of form, reinforce cultural ethics through plays of morality. Heroes such as Ulysses or King Arthur, for example, are triumphant due to their adherence to a codified belief structure, whereas villains, embodying different beliefs (usually defined as evil), generally meet a bad end. While some heroes may transcend cultural boundaries, for example Robin Hood, most can be traced to a specific culture or nation. For example, in many ways Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria are seen by Englishmen as the embodiment of what it means to be English. In the United States, perhaps no better hero represents her self-image than that of the Western frontier sheriff.

So let us use the image of this mythical sheriff as a model of American cultural beliefs concerning the application of warfare. The sheriff is foremost an individual, who is bound by a Judeo-Christian code of ethics and honor. While he represents the law on the frontier, he is not the town mayor, or more importantly, its judge. He exercises his authority based on a public mandate with his station as a lawman clearly visible in the form of a gold star. While his proficiency with a gun is legendary, it is with a nagging regret that he draws it, for killing, although sometimes necessary in the pursuit of justice

or in self-defense, is not something to be glorified. The sheriff faces his opponents openly, in a straightforward contest of skill and resolve. The hero never draws first, but always aims true. While villains usually outnumber the sheriff, his resolve and ingenuity carry the day. Justice is fair, but swift.

This image of the Western hero, steadfast in his belief of bringing justice to a chaotic and lawless world, represents for many Americans the embodiment of what is “good” and “just” about their country. The difficult question is exactly which kind of sheriff is America: John Wayne or Jimmy Stewart? While most Americans would prefer the bold swagger and blunt no-nonsense approach in which John Wayne dealt with the world around him, the rest of the world probably longs for the tough, but soft-spoken Jimmy Stewart. Nevertheless, before sending our sheriff riding into the sunset, it is necessary to first explore the effect that America’s cultural beliefs concerning war has in implementing national strategy.

## Chapter 4

### Ramifications

*Culture, with us, ends in headache.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The previous chapters have served to establish the foundation and framework of American strategic culture defined as “attitudes and beliefs that flow from a distinctive national experience.”<sup>82</sup> With this model now in hand, it is time to see how it fares against the elements of a chaotic world. In so doing, this chapter will examine the effect of American strategic culture both in terms of the formation and implementation of national security strategies. While the reader undoubtedly recognizes that this is a wide-ranging field, this chapter will limit its examination chiefly to two areas. First, we will examine the effect of culture on the conduct of military operations in which US national survival or vital interests are not threatened. This will be accomplished through a comparative case study between US operations in the Philippines from 1899-1902 and her role in Somalia beginning in 1992. The second area studied is the effect of culture on the mechanics of force projection. This examination will focus on the recent US tendency to use airpower as the primary tool of force, in addition to a brief look into non-lethal weapon development. The underlying question in both cases is this: does an American

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<sup>82</sup> Colin S. Gray, “Comparative Strategic Culture” *Parameters* (Winter 1984): 23-32.

cultural bias of waging the “fair and noble” fight lessen her ability to effectively wield national power as the self-declared “leader of the free world?”

Before addressing this question, it is however necessary to further clarify the criteria upon which this chapter will focus. A criticism of the view that strategic culture influences national security strategy is the argument that, in a total war where the very existence of the nation is threatened, her actions will be determined by rational self-interest, not ethics. This is true. To deny that as the level of threat to a nation’s very existence rises, as in the case of World War II, that a nation pursues any and all means to ensure its survival would be foolhardy; simple human nature alone supports this tenet. However, in instances where national survival is not threatened, as in Somalia, Iraq, or the Balkans, the rationality argument fails to account for recent US strategic behavior. In each case, America’s strategic culture played a unique role in determining the scope and level of force deemed appropriate to the conflict. Given present US preeminence in the world, she is far likelier to encounter similar scenarios in the future, rather than those that directly challenge her sovereignty. Therefore, America’s conception of war, rooted in strategic culture, is likely to play an ever-increasing role in shaping the application of military power. A perfect example of this is the US involvement in Somalia.

A comparative case study between US operations in the Philippines from 1899-1902 and her effort in Somalia starting in 1992 offers two unique themes concerning the influence of strategic culture in the application of force. First, both cases serve to underline the differences in approach taken by a western culture when challenged by a non-western enemy. In this light, the similarities between the previously discussed US campaign against Native Americans and the Filipino insurgents is revealing as an

illustration that Western constraints in war have traditionally been extremely biased. The second theme is that this selectivity may be lessening. A comparison of US actions in the Philippines with that of Somalia ninety years later offers stark evidence of a growing universality in constraining force application. Whether this is due to the US desire, now in a unique position as the only remaining superpower, to champion what former President Bush called a “new world order,” or the influence of the social movement of political correctness, is arguable. While the underlying source of this shift is debatable, what seems overwhelmingly clear is that the US will have plenty of opportunities to test her beliefs in an increasingly chaotic world.

### **Rules of Engagement (ROE)**

In May 1898, President William McKinley, eager to take advantage of US victories against Spain in Cuba, directed that an expedition be sent to the Philippines. While the exact reasoning behind this deployment has caused considerable debate among historians, a compelling argument can be made that American involvement in the Philippines was both accidental and incremental.<sup>83</sup> “Ultimately, a series of plausible misunderstandings – the belief that the Filipinos were incapable of self-government, the illusion that the islands were economically valuable”, and finally, a naïve belief that war with Filipino nationalists could be avoided – “all led McKinley to decide that the annexation of the Philippines”, was a “rational course.”<sup>84</sup> American troops, as they disembarked in the Philippines, were governed by General Order 100, a widely recognized directive that “emphasized the occupier’s [the US] obligation to restore order, protect property, and

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<sup>83</sup> Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War 1899-1902* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 5.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

treat civilians with justice and humanity.”<sup>85</sup> Resistance to US efforts, “either through guerrilla warfare or assisting the enemy” was considered a “crime and subject to immediate retaliation.”<sup>86</sup>

Resistance to US efforts came largely in the form of Filipino nationalist insurgents that lacked a centralized political or military organization. Eerily akin to Somalia almost a century later, military authority among the insurgents devolved almost entirely to the regional level, with local strongmen directing the actions of their militias. The objective of the militias was not to vanquish the American army, a task they realized was untenable given American weaponry, but to inflict consistent losses in an effort to win a protracted struggle of attrition.<sup>87</sup> The guerrilla tactics employed were fairly traditional; strike to frustrate and then escape by blending in with the civilian populace.

Although the US geared its initial pacification program to the civil sector, emphasizing the importance of a stable municipal government and social projects, Army commanders became increasingly frustrated over guerrilla activity. In late September 1901, following two separate attacks on US patrols that resulted in significant casualties, those who supported the civic programs became increasingly disheartened, indicating that it was time to shift emphasis. To US Brigadier General Samuel B. M. Young, the fault lay in that US soldiers treated the Filipinos as if they were civilized, when what was required were “the remedial measures that proved successful with the Apaches.”<sup>88</sup> Senior US officials increasingly began to believe that if the “punishments authorized in G.O. 100 against guerrilla warfare were actually enforced – including the suspension of civil

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 211.



rights, trial by provost court, confiscation, deportation, property destruction, and summary execution – the war would be over in a few months.”<sup>89</sup>

In response, General Arthur MacArthur, the US commanding general and military governor of the Philippines, notified his department commanders of a “new and more stringent policy” in dealing with the insurgents.<sup>90</sup> MacArthur announced that all Filipino families that had not committed themselves to the support of the municipal government were assumed to be guilty of aiding the guerrillas. He tasked his commanders to eliminate this support for the guerrilla movement that he concluded existed within the occupied towns, further suggesting that “whenever action is necessary, the more drastic the application the better.”<sup>91</sup> What resulted was that while officially US commanders insisted on high standards of behavior among their troops, soldiers in the provinces increasingly became repressive in their relations with the Filipino population.

A particularly common strategy employed in the field was the destruction of private property in an effort to cripple the guerrilla movement by removing its supporting infrastructure. Indeed, some officers like Young “came to believe that the judicious application of the torch is the most humane way of waging such a war.”<sup>92</sup> Actions taken in retaliation to guerrilla attacks also became increasingly harsh. In response to an attack against a patrol that resulted in the deaths of two US soldiers, a second patrol was immediately sent out, surrounded the village in which the incident occurred and arrested forty-five men, all of whom were later shot “attempting to escape.” Additionally, torture was also practiced, albeit on a limited scale, to ascertain information concerning guerrilla

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 220.

activity. While officially the US did not sanction any of the atrocities being committed in the field, unofficially it seemed to adopt a “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach.

While the fact that US “soldiers committed war crimes is true,” the contention that “race hatred brought American forces in the Philippines to the brink of genocide is a caricature of the historical truth.”<sup>93</sup> The simple truth is that the Filipinos, like the Native Americans before, represented in the eyes of many Americans a lesser people who needed to be shown “the way” to civilization. While Western culture traditionally has cultivated the concept of fair play and chivalry in war, it reserved these constraints until very recently to culturally compatible opponents. What makes this case so intriguing is the comparison between US actions in the Philippines and those of Somalia less than a century later. From a tactical standpoint the environments in both cases are similar: a regionally organized resistance consisting largely of poorly armed and trained militias generally supported by the local public, and a US mission designed to stabilize the region through implementing civil programs that quickly transformed to a counter-guerrilla effort. Although the two environments in which US troops operated shared similar traits, the ROE governing the application of force was radically different.

On January 10, 1994, the Associated Press reported an incident widely publicized in the United States that read: “US snipers kill pregnant Somali woman.”<sup>94</sup> Within two days of the release of this story, the ROE governing the use of deadly force by US personnel changed. Not only did the now increasingly restrictive ROE heighten the indigenous threat to US personnel, but it also served to further exacerbate in the eyes of the American public the lack of a clear strategic policy in the region that ultimately

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 219.

influenced the decision to withdraw. As a comparison to US action in the Philippines, it is important to focus on the following underlying questions: What were the ROE before the alleged sniper incident? What motivated this change in ROE, and to what effect did it have in stabilizing US peacekeeping operations in Somalia?

“Before the arrival of US forces [to Somalia in December 1992 as part of “Operation Restore Hope,”] US Central Command (CENTCOM) developed ROE designed to accomplish both the peacekeeping mission and provide for force protection.”<sup>95</sup> The greatest indigenous threat in Somalia came from the presence of numerous armed civilians on the streets, as well as those in vehicles that were increasingly outfitted with heavy caliber automatic weapons. Given the nature of the threat, initial US ROE was modified from more traditional rules, those requiring actual fire against US personnel before a response was authorized, to ones that considered simply the presence of heavy weapons in itself a threat. ROE in Somalia specified:

Crew serviced weapons are *considered a threat* to UNITAF [Unified Task Force incorporating US and international allies] forces and the relief effort whether or not the crew demonstrates hostile intent. Commanders are authorized to use *all necessary force* to confiscate and demilitarize crew served weapons in their area of operations....Within areas under control of UNITAF forces, armed individuals *may be considered a threat* to UNITAF and the relief effort whether or not the individual demonstrates hostile intent.<sup>96</sup>

The UNITAF ROE were generally viewed as both effective and reasonable. This might have been due in part because there was very little violence directed at US forces during the initial months of the operation. The heavy weapons that were classified as a threat

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<sup>94</sup> F.M. Lorenz, “Rules of Engagement in Somalia: Were They Effective?” *Naval Law Review*, vol. 42 (1995): 62-78.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

were withdrawn or hidden by their owners in response to the overwhelming show of force by UNITAF personnel. This, however, did not last.

In May 1993 UNITAF operations in Somalia were terminated with responsibility for the operation passed to United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM). American forces in the region, although under US command, were placed in support of UNOSOM. To the relief of many soldiers, UNOSOM adopted the UNITAF ROE. However, the Somalis, realizing the shift in command structure, began to test the resolve of the UNOSOM forces and the incidents of armed confrontations began to increase. In response to the increased escalation of violence, UNOSOM expanded the capability of its personnel to use deadly force through the passage of Frag Order 39 that stipulated: “Organized, armed militias and other crew serviced weapons are considered a threat to UNOSOM forces and may be engaged without provocation.”<sup>97</sup> The deaths of 24 Pakistani peacekeepers in June 1993 followed by the bloody battle later that October in which 18 US servicemen were killed only solidified the need to adhere to robust ROE in force protection.

In November and December 1993 US Marine snipers were a key element in force protection, largely being placed at key locations to watch over UNOSOM/US compounds.<sup>98</sup> Snipers engaged targets under the UNOSOM ROE and Frag Order 39. While the threat remained, the local Somalis knew that they would be shot if they carried a heavy weapon within sight of the UNOSOM/US forces compound. “This proved highly

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 68.

effective in keeping the weapons off the street and reducing the threat to UNOSOM/US forces.”<sup>99</sup>

On January 9, 1994 U.S. snipers observed a small truck approaching the compound with a Somali on the back of the truck holding a machine gun on its roof. The weapon was a heavy weapon, not the more common AK-47. The target was clearly within the parameters of the established ROE, resulting in two shots being fired at the vehicle by the snipers. Shortly after the shooting, Somalis appeared at an US checkpoint claiming that a pregnant woman was killed by

US sniper fire. Although an investigation was unable to confirm the accusation, the US media widely reported that the woman had died as the result of sniper fire. The press focused on the ROE. Although the Marines fired lawfully under United Nations rules that permitted them to target anyone carrying a heavy weapon, many within “the press began to question the increasingly perceived indiscriminate nature of a ROE that allowed such a free hand in targeting.”<sup>100</sup> The shooting, coupled with growing US political frustration over ambiguous objectives and lack of apparent progress in stabilizing the region, resulted in a significant change in ROE.

On January 12, 1994 US CENTCOM greatly restricted sniper ROE in Somalia. Individuals carrying heavy weapons could no longer be fired upon. Noting the new ROE, Somalis began to openly display machine guns and Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) launchers on the street, thereby increasing the presence and prestige of the warlords whom the UNOSOM operation was focused against. The US 13<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) commander deployed in Somalia considered the change in ROE a significant

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

limitation on his Marines to provide adequate force protection in a ever threatening environment.<sup>101</sup> American ethical convictions concerning the avoidance of injury to noncombatants buttressed by an apparent lack of progress and ambiguity in how Somalia served national interests resulted in a change in ROE that not only added fuel to the call for removing US personnel, but also placed them in greater jeopardy.

In comparing the ROE of US forces in the Philippines and Somalia, several conclusions can be drawn. First, while Western cultures have traditionally embraced constraints in war, largely influenced by both church and secular beliefs, the rules of conduct have been selective in application. From the Crusades to Africa, from Native America to the Pacific Rim, Western rules governing what is just and fair in war have been, at best, selectively followed. Yet this may be changing, as witnessed in US actions in Somalia and more recently American concern regarding unnecessary hardship or damage inflicted on the citizens of Serbia throughout the Kosovo air campaign. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate a singular cause for this change, it seems intuitive that the removal of a perceived national threat (as envisioned by the spread of communism), the political affirmation that the US supports a new world order in which humanitarian considerations are of greater concern, and a cultural emphasis placed on the rights of all peoples, often termed political correctness, have together not only breathed new life into traditional Western concepts of constraint, but may also have stimulated universality.

Regardless of the source or beneficial effects of a greater sense of universality in regulating US military actions, one cannot escape the realization that this sense of chivalry comes with a price. While the US has historically held the rights and freedom of

#### **Notes**

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 70.

the individual to be the cornerstone of democratic ideals demanding protection under the law, Americans have increasingly been faced with the stark reality that the third world is populated by brutal regimes often led by a single individual. How tempting, especially given the level of precision weaponry today, it must be to simply target the individual.

While US planners have consistently over the years considered command and control a vital strategic target, America has steadfastly held, at least publicly, that specific individuals are not directly targeted. During Operation Desert Shield, for example, when US Air Force Chief of Staff General Dugan suggested that Saddam Hussein might be a target, he was summarily dismissed. President Bush insisted that the US was not in the business of targeting specific individuals with General Schwarzkopf adding “That’s not the way we fight wars anyway.”<sup>102</sup> The reluctance to target enemy leadership directly has been an enduring tenet of US military strategy.

The reluctance of the US to engage in a wartime assassination strategy (which directly targeting enemy leadership essentially is) stems in part from her cultural and legal traditions in protecting the rights of the individual without due process.<sup>103</sup> While few argue the ethical and legal constraints prohibiting the targeting of key individuals in peacetime, some have begun to question their applicability during times of war. When the American public charges political and military leaders to conduct a campaign that is both efficient and effective thereby minimizing loss on both sides in blood and treasure, why then does American culture inhibit a viable means to achieve such a goal? From a

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<sup>102</sup> Bruce A. Ross, “The Case for Targeting Leadership in War,” *Naval War College Review* (Winter 1993): 73-93.

<sup>103</sup> This is not to suggest that if an enemy commander is physically active on the battlefield he is not considered a target, but that US strategy has traditionally not been devised or conducted to the sole goal of assassinating enemy leadership regardless of the strict rationality of that endeavor. In addition to cultural traditions regarding the viability of assassination, the fear of reprisal also presents a deterring factor in adopting this strategy.

historical perspective, striking down impious rulers has, for at least two and a half millennia, “constituted in the eyes of philosophers the only respectable link between ethics and political violence.”<sup>104</sup> In fact, the Bible describes as righteous the slaying of Eglon, the King of Moab, by Ehud ending eighteen years of foreign oppression. Surely it is more just to target the individual responsible for the conflict than thousands of his foot soldiers.

This is not to suggest that a shift in US policy that would authorize specific attacks on enemy leadership is a panacea to long term regional stability or deterrence. Targeting leadership is in itself not a strategy, but an operational tactic. The denial of such a tactic however, especially given US conventional precision and the susceptibility of totalitarian regimes to be centrally driven by a select group or individual, does limit the ability of America to conduct an aggressive coercive campaign against an leader who cares little for his country beyond his personal power and wealth. If, instead, America announced that it would target the individual directly responsible for conflict, one is tempted to ask how many Somalias or Kosovos caught in the crossfire would be spared? However, regardless of the question, it is important to recognize that ROE are driven ultimately by cultural conceptions of ethics. For American culture, the rights of the individual, upon which the nation rallied for independence, have always been of paramount consideration. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Americans tend to see war as a struggle between nations or systems rather than specific individuals. As such, the adoption of an assassination tactic, while tempting, is simply “un-American.”

Rules and traditions governing the conduct of war are the product of a nation’s strategic culture. While this may seem intuitive, it is often forgotten that nations have

#### **Notes**

<sup>104</sup> Bruce A. Ross, “The Case for Targeting Leadership in War,” (Note 21), 83.



different cultures, and hence may consider what is justifiable in war under a different light. For example, on March 13, 2000, the Council of Europe condemned Russian military action in the province of Chechnya as being disproportionate to the level of threat imposed by the rebel forces. While it is certainly desirable to seek a diplomatic solution to the crisis, Western nations must understand the differences in culture with respect to the application of force. Russian history and culture is not European, it is Russian. "Russia from the very start developed a super-centralized state.... It is part of its genetic code, its tradition, the mentality of its people."<sup>105</sup> As such, Russian culture regards the rights of the individual to be in relationship to the state and, therefore, takes a different view regarding human rights in comparison to Western liberalism. In attempting to nudge Russia to adopt a more Western view of the world, it is critical that the West understand this difference. Differences in strategic culture equate to differences in force application.

This section has focused on ROE as an illustration of the effect that strategic culture has in regulating the conduct of nations in times of war. Although the degree to which culture influences the battlefield may depend on the level of threat to national survival, it ultimately remains a vital factor in shaping how a nation fights. While America has recently shown the desire to apply Western based rules of conduct on a more universal basis, she has also maintained her traditional systemic view of war where a nation's capability to generate resistance is targeted as opposed to its leadership. This tendency, has within the last decade, become even more apparent with the rise of airpower as the first, and in some cases only, means selected to exercise military force.

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<sup>105</sup> Vladimir Putin, excerpts from forthcoming book "From the First Person: Interviews With Vladimir Putin" cited in MSNBC report on March 13, 2000, website located at <http://msnbc.com> (author unknown at

## The Mystique of Airpower<sup>106</sup>

The employment of airpower can be a tempting option for US policy makers in that it appears to “offer solutions without overt commitment.”<sup>107</sup> Francis Bacon wrote of command of the sea, that he who has it is “at great liberty, and may take as little of the Warre as he will.”<sup>108</sup> The same holds true for the command of the air. America’s current love affair with airpower, given her culture, is not surprising. Airpower promises everything consistent with an American view of war: technology, quickness, firepower, and more recently a devotion to a systematic campaign with the byproduct hope of victory *without casualties*. The use of airpower, either manned or unmanned, has become America’s first and in at least one case, the only response to foreign aggression.

The political desire to employ airpower as a first, or in some cases, the only US response to foreign aggression is a result of its success in the Gulf War. For some the war against Iraq signaled the emergence of a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) in which precision weapon technology finally seemed to marry firepower with casualty avoidance. The overwhelming coalition air successes in the deserts of Iraq, televised daily across the nation, not only altered how many Americans viewed modern war, but also had the added effect of turning previous US congressional doves into hawks.<sup>109</sup> “More than one distinguished commentator who had reservations about aerial bombardment in the Persian Gulf expressed a newfound belief in its utility as a tool of foreign policy in the

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time of citation).

<sup>106</sup> Significant work within this field has been done by Eliot A. Cohen in “The Mystique of U.S. Airpower” from which the title of this section has been drawn, and the collaborative effort of Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen in *Revolution in Warfare: Air Power in the Persian Gulf War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995)

<sup>107</sup> Eliot A. Cohen. “The Mystique of U.S. Air Power,” *Foreign Affairs* 73, January-February 1994, 109-24.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 110.

Balkans.”<sup>110</sup> To America’s enemies – current and potential – airpower as become a distinctly American form of military intimidation. While airpower may play to the machine-mindedness of American culture, promising direct and accurate destructive force at key points without the necessity of maneuvering costly ground and sea formations, it has limitations. Foremost among these, the application of airpower at best is an operational mechanism, not a grand strategy. American air strikes in Bosnia in 1995 and cruise missile attacks against targets in Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998 give credence to a growing view in Washington that the right application of precision bombing to rattle the natives is in itself an effective strategy. The difficulty is that the application of airpower regardless of the target set being attacked is a poor substitute for grand strategy. Recent US actions in Kosovo offer critical testimony to this fact. American planners anticipating a replay of Bosnia in which Serbian forces withdrew following air strikes, underestimated Slobodan Milosevic’s resolve. The result of the lack of a coherent and unified grand strategy translated to operational stagnation as US planners wrestled to determine the focus of the air campaign following the inability of airpower to coerce Serbia within the first several days.

The difficulty stems from the view of some military strategists, most notably retired US Air Force Colonel John Warden, that the adoption of a purely systemic<sup>111</sup> air campaign focusing on national infrastructure targets provides the seemingly golden bullet to achieving objectives while minimizing casualties on both sides of the conflict. While minimizing casualties surely should be of concern, the danger is in translating this desire

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> The term “systemic” is used in reference to an air strategy designed to paralyze an enemy’s national command authority by degrading the systems that it is reliant upon ( i.e. communication nodes, infrastructure support, industry, etc.) to perpetuate its war effort.

from a concern to an absolute requirement. “Today we [America] expect wars to be short, cheap, and clean...Reduced casualties and reduced collateral damage, both ours and the enemy’s are absolute requirements of tomorrow’s wars.”<sup>112</sup> Airpower, by promising the vision of quick and selective conflict resolution, as demonstrated so vividly in the Gulf, has tapped and amplified America’s cultural affinity for quick, technical, and clean resolutions to such an extent that potential enemies now see America’s vulnerability chiefly as a question of resolve.

The problem of sustained resolve as an increasingly susceptible vulnerability is that it requires on the part of an intelligent adversary very little resources or material commitment. Time, in essence, becomes the chief asymmetric weapon. An outstanding example is the US/British Operation Desert Fox conducted against Iraq in December of 1998. For four days US and British aircraft struck targets in Iraq with the stated objective of reducing Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and production capability while applying pressure against Saddam Hussein in the hope of reducing his political power thereby fostering internal discontent. However, not wanting to conduct military operations during the Arab holiday season of Ramadan, a mere four days away at the start of the air effort, the US gave clear indications that the campaign would be extremely short in duration. As a result, Hussein, who has repeatedly shown little concern for the suffering of his people and continues to maintain an iron grip on internal political power, simply waited out the air attacks. While the US claims that Iraqi WMD programs suffered a serious blow, the absence of UN inspection teams in Iraq complicates confirmation. Once again the lure of the technological fix masqueraded as strategy.

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<sup>112</sup> Owen E. Jensen, “Information Warfare: Principles of Third Wave War,” *Airpower Journal* (Winter 1994): 35-43.

The ability of airpower to precisely strike static targets with little collateral effect has fostered a growing faith within the American public that future wars can be conducted with few casualties on either side of the conflict. Given this belief in precision, Operation Desert Fox and operations in the Balkans suggest that airpower has increasingly become the first, and in some instances the only US response, regardless of its applicability. If, however, the application of airpower, concentrating on systemic attacks in an effort to avoid casualties and collateral damage, fails to adequately achieve desired political goals, then from a strictly rational appreciation, why does the US so frequently turn to it?

The answer may be in what Tony Mason, in his work *Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal* calls the “differential nature of airpower.”<sup>113</sup> The use of airpower Mason concludes, avoids the commitment of ground forces that entails a significant logistic base and support structure within the conflict region. Recalling painful images of Vietnam, opponents of US intervention abroad argue that putting US troops in a volatile region where they are often unwanted or viewed as invading quests will, regardless of intention, inevitably results in an unwinnable quagmire that leaves the indigenous populace worse off than before.<sup>114</sup> Given that both Presidents Bush and Clinton, prior to US engagement in military operations, publicly declared that US actions were intended solely against the adversarial regime in question and not the general populace, the US reluctance to use ground forces is, therefore, not surprising, especially if airpower can directly strike key material systems that exclusively penalizes the adversarial regime. Systemic air attacks, motivated by a culture-rooted desire not to unfairly penalize an adversarial regime’s general populace, have as witnessed in Operation Desert Fox, become the preferred US

#### Notes

<sup>113</sup> Tony Mason, *Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal* (London: Brassey’s, 1994), 256.

response to foreign aggression, regardless of its rational applicability and effectiveness in obtaining the desired objective.

However, as Chaim Kaufmann points out in his article “Intervention in Ethnic and Ideological Civil Wars,” ideological civil wars are different from ethnic conflicts. Ethnic civil wars are not guerrilla quagmires that immediately resurrect the ghost of Vietnam in the American psyche. “Foreign aid or foreign troops can make a tremendous difference to the local balance of forces” provided that interventions “aim at saving lives and establishing defensible territorial settlements, not at reassembling shattered multiethnic states.”<sup>115</sup> In ethnic struggles the main determinant in victory is military power. It determines the territorial outcome and resource allocation of the region. Outside foreign intervention can provide a stabilizing and impartial presence within the region provided that restrictive ROE does not overly hamstring the intervening force.

The difficulty, however, is that the mystique of airpower in promising unprecedented accuracy has become, in the eyes of American leaders, the substitute for ground involvement. American actions in Bosnia and Kosovo offer ample example of this trend. Yielding to a culture-rooted fear of prolonged involvement and seeking to avoid an image of neo-colonialism, American leaders struggle to avoid intervening in intra-state disputes through the employment of ground forces. But in ruling out the use of ground troops, they abandon an option that may offer substantial benefit in ethnic conflicts.

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<sup>114</sup> Chaim Kaufmann, “Intervention in Ethnic and Ideological Civil Wars,” *Security Studies*, no. 1 (Autumn 1996): 62-100.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

## **The Tools of the Trade**

While the lure of high-tech weaponry certainly plays to an American culture that embraces ingenuity and progress as national attributes, there has also been a growing belief that it also could lead to the long sought dream of force application without permanent effect. If, in fact, US resolve can be weakened due to casualties, either to US personnel or indigenous citizens, then the answer, Non-Lethal Weapons (NLW) proponents argue, is to remove the casualty factor from the equation. The expanding field of NLW development promises just this ability. However, while proponents of greater NLW development argue that non-lethal technologies can provide the means to minimize the effect of collateral casualties by removing the lethality of current weapons, the reader will recognize that this is a field still in its infancy. Conclusions drawn in this section are largely based on theoretical speculation and analysis. However, NLW development is a topic that must be addressed, given its potential to shape future US force employment options.

In 1996, realizing the potential of NLWs as an avenue for force application with fewer casualties, the US Department of Defense (DOD), issued Directive 3000.3, naming the Marine Corps as the Executive Agent responsible for program recommendations and for stimulating and coordinating NLW requirements.<sup>116</sup> As such, the DOD recognized that lethal fire and the threat to use it might no longer be an appropriate solution to problems that in the past were considered amenable solely to a conventional military solution.<sup>117</sup> In developing non-lethal technologies, targeting both the individual and a

### **Notes**

<sup>116</sup> DOD Directive 3000.3 *Policy for Non-Lethal Weapons*, 9 July 1996. 3.

<sup>117</sup> DOD Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Program, *A Joint Concept for Non-Lethal Weapons*, website located at <http://iis.marcosyscom.usmc.mil/jnlwd/>, 3.

nation's systemic infrastructure, the US is striving to find a middle ground between abstinence and lethality.

The DOD defines NLWs as “weapon systems that are explicitly designed and primarily employed so as to incapacitate personnel or material, while minimizing fatalities, permanent injury to personnel, and undesired damage to property and the environment.”<sup>118</sup> It is important to note that DOD policy does not require a zero probability of producing fatalities or permanent injury, rather its direction is to develop weapons that significantly *reduce* lethality. Additionally, the DOD has specifically stated that NLWs will augment, not replace, existing conventional weaponry, thus providing a rheostat of force options to the operational commander.

While increasing the force employment options available to the operational commander undoubtedly provides greater tactical flexibility and grants the US the moral high ground, it also creates several potential snares to entrap the unwary. The most basic problem may be a misinterpretation of the term “non-lethal.” As mentioned, the DOD defines non-lethality, not as a zero-sum argument, but as the ability to significantly reduce combat deaths. A helicopter crew, for example, would find little comfort in the “non-lethality” of an EMP pulse that fused their avionics and sent them plummeting to the earth below. With that in mind, politicians and commanders must be especially wary of promoting NLWs as a panacea for combat casualties to a Western public that is already prone to view war as bloodless and clean. Despite the appeal of NLWs, a prudent commander will need to take a proactive media approach, emphasizing that lethal force remains the backbone of military might and may be a necessary option.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 2.



A second snare facing a commander considering NLW employment is determining effective ROE outlining their use. The success of any NLW ROE will largely depend on how the DOD classifies these weapons. If the DOD continues to hold that NLWs are an option and not a replacement of lethal force, then the ROE problem, although still complex, is manageable. Commanders can apply force according to a sliding scale dependent on the threat to US personnel. However, if NLWs are championed as a separate class of weapons, it would not be difficult to envision a scenario in which the military is restricted by its political masters exclusively to their use. Not only would this risk exposing US troops to lethal fire without the authority to respond in kind, but it could also tempt US politicians to be more adventuresome in international intervention.

Determining who can authorize the use of NLWs presents a related problem to those who must tailor ROE for specific contingencies. While operational commanders may agree that authority to use NLWs should be pushed to the lowest tactical level possible, doing so would require a significant investment in training and operational doctrine development. Complicating this problem is the myriad of NLW types and employment considerations, many of which are still in testing phases. In an era of fiscal restraint, will enough effort be placed on NLW training to ensure their operational success? Conversely, will a greater focus on NLW diminish the ability and willingness of future soldiers to employ lethal force? These are questions that must be addressed if the US is to employ NLWs effectively.

While NLW employment issues may appear to be tactical in nature, one must not forget that the willingness and drive to implement them is based on the perception that US strategic culture now expects war to be executed with absolute minimal collateral

damage. Additionally, the ability to effectively employ NLWs in the field may, in fact, serve to sustain, if not amplify, US willingness to intervene internationally if American leaders believe force can be applied without bloodshed being shown on the nightly news. Yet in attempting to appease a perceived public intolerance for casualties, US political leaders may pressure the military into adopting NLWs as the primary response to external threats before either the troops or the weapons themselves are ready. In either case, US strategic culture has a direct effect on the speed and scope of NLW development and employment.

### **Final Thoughts**

This chapter sought to determine the effect that America's strategic culture has had in shaping her ability to exercise national power. In so doing, the search was limited to a specific field: namely, the application of force. While decisions made by US policy-makers are influenced by a myriad of variables and not a singular cause, one cannot deny the effect culture has in shaping perceptions that ultimately serve to construct decisions. The cases in which American military might has been used within the last decade have shown that enduring Western notions of chivalry and constraint, and ones that have traditionally governed conflict among Western-orientated nations, have been given new life and universality by an American passion to promote democratic ideals in a era when US power is unrivaled. This renewed emphasis on self-restraint may safeguard lives, and employing NLWs may help the US seize and hold the ethical high ground in some contingencies, but policy-makers must understand that these options come with a price.

The current tendency of US policy-makers to see solutions as the right application of technology is not unique to American cultural heritage; however, rarely has national

desire matched so closely with technical capability. American military power, as evidenced in Iraq, Somalia, and the Balkans, provides a seductive technological sword with which to smite wrongdoers. The problem is that regardless of how sharp the sword, it is still a sword. The effective application of force, especially in exercising strategies of coercion, requires strategic direction capable of employing a myriad of force options, not just dumping precision guided hardware. If rationality truly governs the direction of national strategy, then this demands that nations explore the most effective means of employing military power to attain political objectives. Clearly this has not occurred. Restrictive ROE and limitations in applying available force options have resulted not from an amoral rational determination to best achieve success, but from culture-rooted ethical desires to limit suffering beyond those individuals directly responsible for the crisis. If this is true then leaders in government, the military, and academia need to better understand how culture influences how national strategy is formulated and carried out.

## Chapter 5

### Reflections

*The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what lies before them; glory and danger alike and yet notwithstanding go out to meet it*

—Thucydides

This study began by posing the question of whether the US culture-based concept of “fighting fairly,” that is, within defined constraints, hinders the nation’s ability to effectively respond to threats to national security. This question presupposes two assumptions: first, that “fighting fairly” is a characteristic of American culture, and second, that American strategic culture does indeed influence the formation and execution of US military strategy. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the evidence presented within this study as to the validity of these two assumptions.

### Characteristics

Given the myriad of definitions that exist across a range of academic fields, and the simple fact that culture itself is a somewhat intangible subject, describing it is no easy task. As stated earlier in this study, culture is defined as an interdependent set of fundamental symbols, values, attitudes and beliefs, common to a specific group, that condition that group’s behavior by coloring its perceptions and preferences. But before reviewing how these elements interact, it is first necessary to revisit certain key concepts.

To summarize, while the US prides herself on being the melting pot of the world and certainly displays traditions within subsets of her culture that are not European, the nexus of American cultural attitudes and beliefs are Western European in origin. This is not to suggest that America is just a bigger Europe; varying factors such as geography and unique shared experiences served to delineate American culture from its historical roots, but the initial colonial attitudes and beliefs that underlined the creation of the American nation were those brought from Europe.

Culture is cumulative and evolutionary. As such, a distinct Western European conception of war developed as an amalgamation of historical experiences stretching back to the early Greeks in their employment of the hoplite phalanx, the co-emergence of Christian and secular ethical beliefs during the Middle Age and Renaissance eras, the evolving nature of the military regimental system, and the influence of naturalist philosophies. All of which combined to create a conceptual framework of war within European society. However, adherence to this framework largely depended on whether the adversary exhibited a culture compatible with that of Western European society. Adversaries considered to be outsiders, as in the case of the Native Americans and Filipinos, were often characterized as savages and, therefore, not afforded the established norms and constraints governing war.

While cultural generalizations can be dangerous if they fail to allow for deviation due to varying strategic circumstances or the influence of individual actors, they can be helpful in identifying beliefs and attitudes that characterize the culture in question. In examining the Western European cultural conception of war, several distinct

generalizations can be made. A Western concept of war has traditionally embraced the beliefs that:

- War is in essence a problem solving tool.
- Identifiable soldiers under strict command and control fight war.
- Collateral damage is to be avoided unless necessary for the prosecution of a just war. Even then, it must be limited proportionally to the importance of the objective; and
- The rights of the individual must be protected. War is not made on the wounded or unarmed. A surrendered enemy is protected.

This is not to suggest that these generalizations are rules or mandates that dictate European strategic behavior, but they are cultural concepts that condition behavior by coloring perceptions and preferences on the subject of war. As such, they influence not only the decision to wage war, but also the direction and prosecution of hostilities in that they provide the group a conception of what war is and how it interplays within the larger strategic environment. Not surprisingly, American culture, as a derivative of Western European attitudes and beliefs also adopted this conception of war.

Culture is both learned as well as evolutionary. Therefore, it is not surprising, that while sharing fundamental similarities with the Western European interpretation of war, American strategic culture also incorporates unique beliefs and attitudes generated by a different environment and shared history. In addition to incorporating Western European beliefs and attitudes concerning war, American behavior is also colored not only by her cultural tendency to divide decision alternatives into two dichotomous extremes, but also by her beliefs concerning technology and the rights of the individual as protected by liberal ideology. Given this framework, Americans are often prone to see themselves as the quintessential, mythical, American Western sheriff: a force for good that, while regretting the use of violence, will freely exercise it, if needed, with great speed, lethality,

and most importantly, discrimination. Removing the villainous black-clad criminal, in an open confrontation on the town's dusty main street, allows the hero to ride into the sunset. The American interpretation of war is similar: the open defeat of an evil enemy by a direct and lethal application of overwhelming force, governed by specific rules of conduct and discrimination. In the American mindset this is the best way to quickly discharge hostilities and return to peace.<sup>119</sup> On the surface this view seems to support the rationality argument because it characterizes Americans as wanting to pursue political objectives directly; however, Americans tend to frustrate their own desires for rapid, direct action by restraining the level of effort they expend against weaker adversaries and by limiting their tactical options with constraining ROE. This tension between the desire for quick definitive victory and moral restraint is a defining trait of contemporary American strategic culture.

### **Degree of Influence and Ramifications**

A rational calculation directed to the attainment of a political objective, Clausewitz contends, is the driving factor, both in a nation's decision to engage in war, and the level of effort it will expend in its pursuit. As such, any constraints on force exercised during war, in reality, are those that are determined, through rational amoral calculation, to be in the best interest of the nation. However, if the rationality argument holds true, then national strategy, in determining the course and scale of the conflict, will logically minimize, to the greatest extent possible, any limitations or constraints that may jeopardize the attainment of the given political objective. Recent US strategic behavior in

#### **Notes**

<sup>119</sup> Rules of conduct refer to established traditions of "fair play," such as not shooting someone in the back, which on a larger strategic scale is akin to American beliefs regarding direct assassination of enemy leadership.

Somalia, Iraq, and the Balkans undermine this argument. Clearly there must be another factor that has an influence upon the scale and propagation of war, especially in cases that the nation engaged in hostilities is not directly threatened. The overlooked factor is strategic culture.

Strategic culture has a direct influence on how a nation conceives war. As such, it influences both how much effort will be expended and how military force will be applied. However, rules and traditions governing the nature and conduct of war are those that, until very recently, were selectively applied. American colonial as well as later US military operations against Native Americans and Filipinos offer relevant testimony to the selective nature of constraints in war. However, this selectivity does seem to be fading. Restrictive ROE in Somalia, the announced cessation of air strikes coinciding with the Arab holiday of Ramadan during Operation Desert Fox, and the exclusive use of airpower as a means of coercion in Kosovo all serve to illustrate the American desire to constrain the application of military force. Constraints imposed on these conflicts, given their inherent detrimental effect upon the overall operations, are not the result of amoral calculations designed to best attain political goals, but from a desire to minimize collateral damage and deaths in an effort to sustain American public opinion by adhering to its culture-based conception of war.

A critical part of marshaling and sustaining US public support for continued military engagement overseas, especially in peacekeeping and nation building roles that require significant investments in time, is a clear perception of war as it truly exists, not as we would wish it to be. In proclaiming the absolute requirement for clean, cheap, and quick wars we may very well be setting the stage for our own psychological defeat and political



paralysis if our vision of war does not come to fruition. This does not mean that the US should seek wars of attrition, or use whatever means at her disposal to resolve conflicts. But political and military leaders owe the public, the troops, and themselves a fundamental level of honesty: they must recognize the true and enduring nature of war and realize that things will not always go according to a systematic plan with airpower as its sole executor.<sup>120</sup> If America is to engage in hostilities, then overwhelming force should be applied intelligently to attain the political objective in question. Not only will this shorten the length of the conflict, but it may also enhance US credibility in coercive operations, operations that have become the primary focus of US military power in the post Cold War world. Unfortunately, US success in these kinds of operations has been moderate at best.

America's difficulty in coercing regional foes can be explained largely by the very nature of coercive diplomacy. Coercion generally requires a credible threat of pain or hardship beyond the benefits that an adversary may anticipate through resistance.<sup>121</sup> Yet the US, through self-imposed constraints reflective of her strategic culture, is limited as to the type and level of pain she is willing to inflict. Adversaries capitalizing on such constraints are, in fact, given an avenue to contest US efforts, despite being militarily inferior. The level of interest of each participant further hampers this imbalance. For Saddam Hussein or Slobodan Milosevic, failure may result not only in a loss of power, but also a loss of their own lives. By contrast, the US often gets involved for humanitarian reasons or to preserve alliance cohesion and power, hardly concerns that

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<sup>120</sup> Conversino, "Sawdust Superpower: Perceptions of US Casualty Tolerance in the Post-Gulf War Era," *Strategic Review* (Winter 1997): 15-47.

<sup>121</sup> Daniel Bryman and Mathew Waxman, "Defeating US Coercion" *Survival*, No.41 (Summer 1999): 107-20.

translate to the US public at large as vital national interests. In the dynamic process of move-countermove that is coercive diplomacy, constraints that the US places on its own force application minimize the level of pain she is willing to apply, thereby restricting potential coercive strategies and granting her adversaries an asymmetric advantage. While a universal solution may not be possible, a step in the right direction may be for the national command authority to *realistically* assess the extent of US military power, given its culturally imposed limitations, *prior* to the commitment of US forces, not after.

This study has addressed the issue of strategic culture by defining the term, qualifying its characteristics, and then determining the level of impact upon recent US strategic behavior. As such, it has demonstrated that rationality alone does not either drive a nation to war or determine the scope and direction of military operations. This is not to suggest that US leadership fails to rationally consider the interests of the nation when contemplating the use of force, but that amoral calculations are not the chief determinant in shaping how the US exercises military power. With that said, it is necessary to examine the relationship between strategic culture and rationality in determining the application of military force. This will have a direct bearing in answering the question of whether strategic culture hinders national strategy.

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